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DAUGHTERS OF THE VITASTA

DAUGHTERS OF THE VITASTA

A HISTORY OF KASHMIRI WOMEN
FROM EARLY TIMES TO THE PRESENT DAY

By

PREM NATH BAZAZ

1959

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NEW DELHI INDIA

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* GANDHISM, JINNAHISM, SOCIALISM (In Urdu)
* SHAIR-I-INSANIYAT (POET OF HUMANISM) (In Urdu)

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To my daughters

GAURI, INDU, VITASTA, VIJAY AND MADHU
whose cheerful disposition during the
long days of my imprisonment inspired
the writing of this book.

PREFACE

The purpose of writing this book is to depict Kashmiri women as they lived through different periods of history, to describe their past achievements, long days of adversity and present struggle for emancipation.

Although the book contains vignettes of outstanding women who flourished from early times in any field of social activity, I have, for obvious reasons, not included those whose forefathers left the valley generations ago and who are now permanently settled in different parts of the Indian subcontinent.

Lest reading of the early part of the book gives rise to revivalist tendencies, I would like to say that it is none of my desires to create a mythical golden age in which Kashmiri women achieved unsurpassable glory. I am fully aware of the limitations under which they lived during the best epochs of history to advocate revival of ancient ideals and beliefs. Despite the imperfections of modern social life, there is no gainsaying that today we live in a better world where both men and women find vaster opportunities and greater freedom for the unfoldment of their potentialities. Revivalism is by no means a healthy doctrine nor can its adoption contribute to prosperity of a people. My endeavour in narrating the heroic and noble deeds of Kashmiri women is not to idolise the past but to rekindle the spirit of adventure which characterised them before Kashmir was bound down in servitude.

In collecting material for the work I was confronted with unusual obstacles. Apart from the paucity of literature on the subject, my inability to visit Kashmir has been a serious handicap. I could neither consult the books and manuscripts lying in the Pratap Singh Public Library, the State Museum, the Research Department and other educational and cultural centres in Kashmir nor personally study recent developments and present conditions in the valley before embarking on writing work.

Ideological differences with the ruling party caused, in 1950, my banishment from the State. Permission to return to my homeland was refused to me by the authorities during the last nine years. It has proved a great hindrance in the way of utilising much of the source-material. But I have taken fullest advantage of the books in different languages available outside and the articles which have appeared on Kashmir in the press from time to time. The notes and the diaries which I have maintained over the past thirty years have also proved much helpful. It is, however, possible that despite my best efforts certain parts of the history could not be adequately dealt with or some women among the contemporary writers, artists and social workers, in no way less remarkable than those mentioned, have been unintentionally left out. In view of the difficulties mentioned

above, the deficiencies, if any, will, I hope, be condoned by the indulgent reader. This is a pioneer work in a particular domain of literature and apt to suffer from the shortcomings usual to its kind. Even so, I have taken pains to verify every statement made and figure given in the book. I shall be really sorry if any inaccuracy has crept in due to some inadvertence on my part.

While preparing the manuscript I consulted a large number of writers, past and contemporary, who have recorded facts and events or expressed views concerning Kashmir and its people. Some of them are mentioned in the bibliography given at the end of the book. Notable among the authors on whose works I have freely drawn are Kalhana, Kshemendra, Bilhana, Jonaraja and Srivara of the medieval period and G. T. Vigne, Fredric Drew, M. A. Stein, E. F. Neve, C. T. Biscoe, M. D. Fauq, K. M. Munshi, R. C. Kak and G. M. D. Sufi of the modern times. I am deeply beholden to them all.

The sub-chapter on Kotadevi has appeared as my article entitled "Kota—the last sovereign queen of Kashmir" in the January 1958 issue of *Caravan* (New Delhi).

The writing of this history, at any rate of the part dealing with the current period, would have been well-nigh impossible but for the unstinted help which some friends gave me by supplying me with information about recent changes. I am grateful for this, more so because most of the friends prefer to remain unidentified.

My thanks are due to D. N. Dhar for preparing a note on Rupa Bhawani which forms the basis of the sub-chapter on the hermitess. I am obliged to S. N. Koul who collected statistics about the girls education in the valley. I am under a debt of obligation to Shanta Bazaz, who spent a couple of months in Srinagar last summer meeting heads of different institutions and other people to verify data used in the last two chapters.

I am grateful to Keshav Malik, S.N. Nehru, Suyash Malik and J.N. Sathu who went through the manuscript or parts of it and made certain valuable suggestions which I have adopted.

Lastly, I express my gratitude to M. L. Koul and Mohan C. Bazaz for the labour which they spent over typing and retyping of the manuscript before it went to the press.

Though the aforementioned persons have taken interest in my work, I want to make it clear that none of them is responsible for the views expressed or inferences drawn in it which are all my own.

New Delhi
18th March, 1959

Prem Nath Bazaz

CONTENTS

Chapter		*Page*
	PREFACE	VII
One	A GENERAL SURVEY	1
Two	CELEBRATED HINDU QUEENS-REGNANT	22
	(1) Yashovati	23
	(2) Sugandhadevi	29
	(3) Didda the Terrible	44
	(4) Kotadevi the Heroic	
Three	ILLUSTRATED HINDU QUEENS-CONSORT	57
	(1) Ishandevi	59
	(2) Vakpushta	60
	(3) Ananglekha	63
	(4) Srilekha	66
	(5) Suryamati	69
	(6) Jayamati	83
	(7) Raddadevi	86
	(8) Kalhanika	87
Four	OTHER NOBLE CHARACTERS	98
	(a) Military Commanders	100
	(i) Silla	
	(ii) Chudda	
	(b) Danseuses	107
	(c) Diplomats	112
	(d) Religious Leaders	113
	(e) Builders	118
Five	LALLA : HARBINGER OF NEW AGE	123
Six	EMINENT MUSLIM QUEENS	139
	(1) Lachhma	139
	(2) Bibi Haura	141

CONTENTS—(*Continued*)

Chapter		*Page*
	(3) Gul Khatun	144
	(4) Mera Mukhat	145
Seven	HABBA : SONGSTRESS BECOMES QUEEN	153
Eight	SOME REMARKABLE FIGURES	158
	(1) Sri Khatun	158
	(2) Bhombra Khatun	158
	(3) Begum Saliha	159
	(4) Lachhma	159
	(5) Zoon Ded and Zai Ded	160
	(6) Vyath and Dehat	160
	(7) Shaha Bibi	161
	(8) Sahiba Nishawan	161
	(9) Hafiza Maryam	162
	(10) Hafiza Khadija	162
	(11) Tara and Utsava	163
	(12) Ratnamala, Dipamala and Nripamala	164
	(13) Rupa Bhawani	165
Nine	TWO BRAVE SOULS	169
	(1) Kudamal	172
	(2) Arnimal	175
Ten	FARZI : FROM SLAVE-GIRL TO RULER	179
Eleven	TOTAL ECLIPSE	193
Twelve	NOBLE WORK OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES	205
Thirteen	YEARS OF RESURGENCE	220
Fourteen	EMERGENCE FROM DARKNESS	244

"Kashmir is a land which delights in insurrections.....
In this country dancing women of the temples of the gods take a pleasure in upheavals against the king."

KALHANA
in *Rajatarangini* (1148 A.D.)

"The people of Kachemire are proverbial for their complexions and fine forms.... The women especially are very handsome; it is from this country that nearly every individual when first admitted to the court of the Great Mogol, selects wives or concubines, that his children may be whiter than the Indians and pass for genuine Mogols."

FRANCOIS BERNIER
in *Journey to Kachemire, the Paradise of the Indies* (1665 A.D.)

CHAPTER ONE

A GENERAL SURVEY

IN the sub-continent of India it is the unique distinction of Kashmir that she has produced poets and writers who have from early times left literary compositions, in verse and in prose, to enlighten us about their respective times. But these records, though valuable, fall far below the modern standards of historiology and most of them hardly deserve even the name of history; at best they are the chronicles of wars waged by the kings, exploits of the military generals, descriptions of the royal courts and accounts of the activities of the nobles. Seldom, if at all, any accurate, reliable or detailed information has been noted about the material or cultural life of the ordinary men and women. It is only by a close and careful study of the recorded accounts or through a deligent examination of the surviving pieces of contemporary architecture and sculpture that a researcher can draw inferences and make intelligent guesses, more or less accurate, regarding the circumstances in which the common people lived in the ancient and medieval periods in the valley.

It is true that Kashmir has been very fortunate in having a historian of the calibre and brilliance of Kalhana who has preserved precious records of the political, social, and economic life of his homeland spreading over thousands of years from the time of the Pandavas to his own day, 1149 A.D., but, without any thought of disparagement or idea of detracting from the well-recognised merits of his composition, the *Rajatarangini*, it may be safely observed that his monumental work is not free from deficiencies. Kalhana at times forgets the role of a historian and indulges in poetic fantasies and exaggerations. He tells us many

things about the kings, the courtiers and the commanders; he makes lengthy statements on the royal families and those closely associated with them; his descriptions and narratives are frequently graphic, often entertaining, sometimes amusing and always absorbing; but he very rarely gives a satisfactory or sufficient account of the social conditions in which the poorer classes lived and had their existence. Likewise, the *Rajatarangini* has very little to say about the womenfolk of the lower strata of the society. Other historians who have copied Kalhana, adopted his method and followed his tradition are no better in this respect. Nevertheless, drawing exhaustively on the contents of the *Rajatarangini* and other works of history as well as the literary productions of the outstanding Kashmiri writers of the past, we are able, to a considerable extent, to construct a picture of the Kashmiri woman as she lived through different ages.

Whatever else might remain obscure, it is clear that through their long history Kashmiri women have witnessed varying fortunes. At times they have risen to pinnacles of glory, distinguished themselves as rulers in their own right, as regents of minor princes, as powerful queens-consort, as diplomats in peace and war, as commanders of armies, as thrifty land ladies, as builders and reformers and as preceptors of the religious lore. As well in singing and dancing, they had earned fame in keeping homes. There were few walks of life in which they did not achieve prominence and there was no social activity in which they did not participate side by side with their menfolk. But progress did not have a continuous flow, glory did not prove everlasting, and they had to suffer many buffets at the hands of ill fate. Times came when they fell on evil days and were gradually deprived of the rights previously enjoyed by them. In still darker days, they were enslaved both intellectually and physically. However, under bondage they did not wholly give in but, despite the soul-shattering ignominy to which they were subjected, they valiantly struggled against injustice during the long dismal period. With the dawn of modernism in Kashmir at the close of the last century, the women have slowly started re-emerging in social life to contribute their share to the freedom struggle and to the reconstruction of their homeland.

There is ample material in the *Rajatarangini* about the queens, the ladies of the aristocratic families and high birth and about those associated with the royal houses in one way or the

other. There are also references in the celebrated book to many remarkable women who had anything to do with the wars fought by the kings with outsiders to conquer foreign territories, with quelling of disturbances on borders or with suppression of rebellious factions within their own domains. Some light is also thrown and many dark corners of social life illuminated by brief statements which are interspersed in the history on the condition of ordinary women; we begin to see them as they lived, moved and had their being in the ancient Kashmir.

Broadly speaking, from early times down to the thirteenth century A.D., Kashmiri women enjoyed remarkable freedom, wielded ample power and exercised responsibility which gave them a high status in the society. Members of both the sexes equally shared joys and sorrows of life. Not that the Kashmiri women were absolutely free from the agonising restrictions which the ancient Hindu society imposed on the fair sex. According to the authoritative law-givers like Manu and Parashar, a woman whatever her age was considered a minor in law. As a girl she remained under the tutelage of her parents, as an adult, of her husband, and as a widow, of her sons. Her life was not valued highly; some law books assess a woman's weregild as equivalent to that of a shudra irrespective of her class. No doubt most schools of law allowed her some personal property (*stridhana*) in the form of clothing and jewellery, which compares favourably with the property rights of the woman in several other early civilizations. But, on the whole, despite the fact that she was raised to the position of a goddess and a saint, a woman was little better than a slave in ancient Hindu society.

In Kashmir, however, the status of a woman was much better than in the rest of India. Here they were afforded opportunity to distinguish themselves in any sphere of social activity. As a matter of fact "they had emerged from the domestic into the political stage, were free, owned landed and other immovable property, managed their own estates and even fought on the battle field as generals and commanders at the head of troops"[1]. At least some women attained enviable positions in the social or political life which enabled them to exercise enormous influence so that at times even kings and nobles had to bow before their stubborn resolve.

[1] R. S. Pandit, *River of Kings* (The Indian Press, Allahabad, 1935), P. XXXIII.

Usually, in Kashmir, as elsewhere, men ascended the throne and ruled the country, but there was a tradition as forceful as law, that at the time of coronation when the king was crowned, the queen had to be present and actively participate in the ceremony. She shared the throne in the royal durbar on the auspicious occasion and was sprinkled with the sacred waters of the *abhisheka* (coronation) in the same manner as the king, by the royal preceptor (*Rajguru*). Nor did this active participation of the queen-consort end with the completion of the coronation ceremony. While the king was the master and the ruler of the land, the queen had her separate funds, her own treasurers and councillors to help and advise her on affairs of state. She never ceased to take deep interest in the administration of the kingdom. Like the king, she used to hold her own open levees and receive the homage of the feudatory chiefs, prominent nobles and big officers of the state. Thus, trained in the art of governance, the queen, at the demise of the king (if it occurred during her lifetime), functioned as the regent of the minor prince or ascended the throne and ruled the country in her own right if, and so long as, she felt the necessity of doing so. Four notable women have enjoyed the sovereign power independently as queens-regnant; many more have acted as regents during the periods when the heirs-apparent were either minor or unfit to rule. As we shall have occasion to see in the course of this survey, from all accounts that have come down to us these ladies have done well in comparison with the kings who have preceded or succeeded them.

Let no one be misled into thinking that, with substantial power and influence enjoyed by the queens, a state of dual authority existed in Kashmir causing maladministration. There was nothing of the sort. The king was *de facto* no less than *de jure* the sole ruler and his word was final in all matters concerning the state but, in normal times, he could seldom adopt a decision on any problem of vital importance affecting the interest of the people without the previous consultation with and, in certain cases, prior consent of his queen; he could not even make appointments to key positions without taking her advice. In order to run the administration smoothly and well, queens were generally co-operative and loyal, and ordinarily the kings would have their own way but occasionally, in case of disagreement, it was not necessarily the view of the king that prevailed. Even the question of succession to the kingdom and installation

of a new prince on the throne is stated to have been finally settled by strong-minded queens of Kashmir.

The pre-eminence of women in the fields of social and political activity would be unthinkable without their advance in education and learning. According to the older sacred texts Hindu women of the higher castes were educated and participated in philosophical debates and discussions. "*Srauta* and *Grihya-sutras* mention how the wife uttered Vedic *mantras* (prayers) as an equal with the husband at the religious ceremonies (e.g. *Asvalayana Sr. S ;* 11, etc.,). Gobhila (Gr. S., 1,3) states that the wife must be educated enough to be able to take part in Vedic ceremonies of mystical significance."[2]

But in later periods Hindu society became less liberal and denied higher education to women ; it was thought that knowledge of scriptures hampered their growth and was not conducive to the general welfare of the community. The scope of education for women was narrowed. "By the time of *Smrtis* around the beginning of the Christian era, Vedic knowledge was closed to women although the heterodox sects still catered for them."[3] Surrounded by high mountains and aloof from the rest of the sub-continent, Kashmir appears to have remained mostly unaffected by this illiberal wave. Under Buddhism the women of the valley became freer and received better intellectual nourishment. In the early middle ages after the downfall of that libertarian creed, the Kashmiri thinkers evolved an eclectic school of philosophy known as the *Trika* or Triad. Its offshoot, the tantric sect, flourished in the 8th century and soon brought the entire society under its sway. The two outstanding features of the new cult were the worship of feminine divinities and the institution of the orders of female ascetics. With the spread of these doctrines, Kashmiri women gained more importance and achieved a higher status. Although it is difficult to state with any amount of accuracy how far the women had progressed in education and whether all classes, high and low, had facilities available to enrich their minds, but proofs are not wanting that a fairly large number were literate. Girls of the poorer classes and low castes could never have been to school nor tasted any joys of intellect. But high caste women were well advanced and capable to match their intellectual attainments with the scholarship

[2] Radha Kumud Mukerjee, "Women in Ancient India", in *Women of India* (Publications Division, New Delhi, 1958), pp 5-6.

[3] A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, (Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1954), p. 178.

of learned men. In the eighth century, Shankaracharya, having defeated, in heated disputations, many Buddhist savants in various parts of India, arrived in Kashmir, then the renowned seat of learning and culture. He challenged Mandan Misra, the recognised local authority on religion, for a discourse. When the historic debate started, the two intellectual titans could find no better referee to judge between them than Ubhayabharati, Mandan Misra's wife, which is a conclusive proof of her ability and impartiality. Misra lost the debate but his gifted wife took it up and forced Shankaracharaya to plead for postponement so that, to continue the debate, he may acquire the requisite knowledge and experience which he lacked.[4]

Ubhayabharati was not a solitary instance of her kind in the old and medieval Kashmir. Among the brahmans and other high caste women literacy was common and many of them were well versed in scriptures and literature in general. In his semi-historic work *Vikramankadevcharita* (The Deeds of Vikramanka), after recording the life and adventures of his patron the great Chalukya Emperor Vikramaditya VI (c.1075—1125 A.D.), Bilhana who was the poet laureate at the court of Kalyan in the Deccan (11th century), gives, in the last canto of his book, a brief account of his motherland and its people. While describing the women of Kashmir, their beauty and accomplishments, the poet tells us that they spoke Sanskrit fluently."[5] Kalhana and other writers too have succinctly eluded to their scholarship and erudition. Abhinavagupta, the brilliant theorist of the Trika, has stressed that women have equal right with men to study philosophy and are as much eligible to take part in religious rites and rituals. Yet, it is strange, that not a single book or treatise written by a Kashmiri woman has survived from the old times. One can only surmise that such productions, if there were any, have been destroyed either by the vagaries of time or the cruel hands of vandals.

In the matter of personal adornment and the ways of living, Kashmiri women of the early times were no less remarkable. They loved to be gaily attired and had invented styles in dress and in make-up of hair which indicate a high level of culture. In sculpture as well as in literature they are often depicted wearing jackets and bodices which serves as an evidence that during those days the art of sewing must have been known. Un-

[4] Lila Ray, "Women Writers" in *Women of India*, p. 179.

[5] As quoted in *River of Kings* by R.S. Pandit, pp. 175-176.

like the women of the south who remained uncovered up to the waist, the women in the valley and other parts of the north were adequately dressed using bodices or jackets to protect themselves against severe cold. The lower parts of the body including the legs were wrapped up either in a piece of long cloth which was tied to the waist or in a sewn garment not very different from that which is used by rustic womenfolk in India today. Wearing of shirts and trousers seems to have become common in medieval times in the valley as in Gandhara (North-Western Frontier and East Afghanistan). The trousers were probably first introduced by the Kushans as they were in vogue among the ruling classes under them. Generally, women are shown wearing head veils or simple tiara-like head dresses; sometimes they are depicted bare-headed with the hair made up in a variety of fashions.

On battlefield the Kashmiri women wore red trousered uniforms like other Kashmiri soldiers in arms. Occasionally, some care-free maidens took fancy to be dressed in the garb of men and moved about thus attired in the streets and public places of entertainment. No eyebrows were raised in astonishment, no accusing fingers pointed at them.

The most popular coiffure with the Kashmiri women was a large bun at the nape of the neck often ornamented with a fellet or string of jewels; the pig-tail was common through all times among the unsophisticated sections, elderly ladies and unmarried girls of all classes. There were many other fashionable ways of hair make-up which are mentioned in the contemporary literature and represented in the sculpture.

Gold, silver and precious stones of every available description were in demand for embellishment of the body. The Kashmiri women wore heavy rings and other large ornaments in ancient days, as now, which stretched their ears and not infrequently damaged the lobes. They wore jewelled ornaments on their forehead and along the parting of the hair. Ornate necklaces were worn. Bangles and armlets were popular as also anklets often set with little tinkling bells to produce melodious sounds while they walked. The Muslims introduced some more ornaments during the days of their rule; probably the nose-ring was their innovation which was in vogue among wealthier sections until recent times.

Among the ornaments, pride of place was given to *deji-hor*, an egg-shaped, solid but intricately engraved two-piece set,

hanging from both ears with the support of a strong thread (*ata-hor*) which was fastened to the head-gear with a pin and was covered with smaller differently designed hollow ornaments. In the Srinagar Museum there exists, among the few surviving pieces of sculpture, one, belonging to the later 10th century, in which the birth of Buddha is depicted with the mother Mayadevi and another lady both wearing *deji-hor* just as it is worn today. With the passage of time this ornament gained sanctity and was considered an important symbol of married life without which a Kashmiri woman would feel miserable, destitute and unfit to move out of her house. It is worn only by married women. Because of the religious significance attached to it Muslim women have discarded *deji-hor*; other ornaments remain the same with the women of both the communities.

The Kashmiri goldsmith must have attained a high standard in his art as ever-new fashions in different ornaments were in demand by the ladies of well-to-do classes. Even the poorer women who could not afford gold or gems loaded themselves with jewellery of silver, brass or other baser metals. And all classes adorned their hair, ears and neck with fragrant and beautiful flowers which the valley provides in abundance.

Beauty aids were various and commonly used by the women of cultured classes to look pretty and attractive in social gatherings. Among the cosmetics was a paste made of finely ground dust of sandal-wood which was smeared over the whole body or applied with varying patterns frequently coloured with dyes. Kalhana refers to painting with the sandal paste and other emollients of the faces of ladies[6] which shows, as pointed out by R. S. Pandit, that the art of making up the face must have been in vogue in old Kashmir with trained men to do the Beauty Parlour treatment.[7] Collyrium or eye-salve (*anjana*) usually made of black-powdered antimony was very popular and, besides enhancing the beauty of the eyes, it was supposed to prevent ophthalmia. Vermilion, rubbed saffron and sandal wood were used in adorning the forehead to beautify the face. Describing the personal appearance of women in King Harsha's days Kalhana writes: "Set off with golden leaf of Ketaka the bun coiffure was decked with long flower garlands: the tremendous blossoms of the *tilaka* embraced the lovely forehead patch; the line of collyrium joined the corners of the eyes to the ears; bows

[6] *Rajatarangini*, III taranga, 382 shloka.

[7] Op. cit., p. 88 fn.

of string woven with gold were tied at the end of the tresses which were worn in plaits; the long tail-end of the lower garments kissed the surface of the floor; the brassiere which traced the curves of the breasts concealed the upper half of the arms; when they wore men's dresses they bore the charm of the god of love in disguise."[8]

To appear beautiful and to live gaily were, among several others, two ambitions of the Kashmiri women. Dressed in shining costumes they participated not only in religious fairs and social festivals but witnessed open-air theatres, musical performances, public games and promenade concerts to derive pleasure. Dancing and singing were their common pastime, in which ladies of respectable families had attained high proficiency. In days of decline the love of gaiety and self-adornment manifested itself in dissolution and profligacy. In his neat and lucid poem *Samayamatrika* Kshemendra has wittily described the rakish progress of an artiste who gave public performances of dancing and singing throughout the valley in the beginning of the eleventh century A.D.

Naturally *purdah* (screening of women from the gaze of men) could find no place in a society in which women had achieved a substantial measure of freedom. Authorities are divided on the point whether the demoralising custom prevailed in ancient India and if it did, what was its nature and scope. It is, however, generally held that there was some sort of seclusion of women in the Hindu society. K. M. Panikkar thinks that in the Middle Ages at least in North India the seclusion of women had become the rule among the higher classes. He is further of the opinion that there is evidence to show that such seclusion, at least among kings and nobles, was practised even in the earlier times[9]. His views are corroborated by Bhasham who says that "kings, at any rate, kept their womenfolk in seclusion. The detailed instructions of the *Arthashastra* make it quite clear that the *antahpura*, or royal harem, was closely guarded, and its inmates were not allowed to leave it freely".[10]

Although the prevalence of the evil practice in the neighbouring regions could not have been unknown to the Kashmiris, yet they were always opposed to it. They held very rational views about the observance; these have been clearly stated by

[8] Op. cit. VII, 928-31 shlokas.

[9] K. M. Panikkar, "The Middle Period", in *Women of India*, p. 11.

[10] Op. cit., p. 179.

the great writer Somadeva who flourished in the 11th century A. D. In his prodigious composition *Katha-sarit-sagara* (Ocean of Story) there is a remarkable observation by a princess, Ratna Prabha, which reflects the public opinion of the time : she says; "I consider that the strict seclusion of women is a mere custom, or rather a folly, produced by jealousy. It is of no use whatever. Women of good family are guarded by their own virtue as by their only chamberlain. Even God himself can scarcely guard the unchaste[11]." Kalhana makes no mention of this pernicious custom anywhere in his stupendous work. It baffled the imagination of the civilised Kashmiri that women could be kept in seclusion or girls segregated from boys. It is true there were inner apartments (*antahpura*) in the royal palaces as well as in the homes of courtiers, nobles and other well-to-do families in Kashmir too where women lived in privacy and which were held sacred ; but a suggestion to the ladies to move about veiled or to remain aloof from men would have sounded humiliating and offensive in the ears of the men no less than in those of the women.

Nevertheless, it must be recognised that in certain respects Hindu society in Kashmir as elsewhere adopted customs and enacted laws which were inequitous to women and did not allow them the same freedom as enjoyed by men ; at least in one respect—burning of widows—the custom was abominable and cannot be supported by any canon of civilisation or humanity.

From the point of view of the sacred law, a Hindu marriage was indissoluble once the seven steps had been taken together by the bride and the groom in presence of the holy fire and the people assembled at the time of the nuptial rites. Even if not consummated, the marriage could not be annuled, and divorce was quite impossible in case of either party. But this was only the theoretic position. In practice, the law was strictly enforced where woman was concerned ; a man could remarry in the lifetime of his first wife and, what was worse, he could take as many girls as he wished into wedlock. For small faults or on mere pretexts innocent women were divorced. An errant wife lost most of her rights ; her husband was responsible for her bare maintenance if it was demanded ; but she was not entitled to remarry.

Polygamy was allowed in Kashmir and carried the stamp of social approval ; usually the ruling princes and the men of the

[11] Quoted in *Women of India*, p. 11.

upper classes had plurality of wives. In the *Rajatarangini* we read that some kings possessed more than one hundred beautiful damsels in their harems. King Harsha outdid all others ; says Kalhana : "In his inner-apartments over three hundred and sixty women of pure character were openly admitted by him whose mind had become infatuated"[12]. Nobles and grandees too married as many girls as they could afford to maintain. There were practically no restrictions on the liberty of man in this behalf. Often, most of these unfortunate ladies survived the death of their husbands. They were not allowed to have another partner in life as remarriage of windows was forbidden. Worse still, the widows of the princes and upper class men were burned with the dead bodies of their husbands on the funeral pyre. This horrible practice was so much in vogue, encouraged and admired that a cultured person with manifest humanist tendencies and urbane views like Kalhana, frequently glorifies ladies in bombastic poetry who pretended willingly and joyfully to ascend the pyre.[13]. The poet-historian scathingly upbraids those youthful women who, for even good reasons, refused or tarried to commit self-immolation.[14] Innumerable instances of *sati* (burning of widows) are described in the *Rajatarangini* and some other old books : how charming ladies in their budding youth were heartlessly reduced to ashes amidst fiendish shouts of social fanatics.

It would have been inexplicable if in a society of advanced women as we find it in old Kashmir, there were no cases of revolt against the savage customs. A few queens and other ladies of the royal birth successfully resisted the stone-heartedness, managed to survive the funeral of their husbands and enjoyed active life till natural causes gathered them to their fathers. For instance, Didda, the voluptuous queen, outlived Kshemagupta to become not only the regent of her sons and power behind the throne but also to rule in her own right for many years ; and when she saw death approaching, she made a selection of her successor from among the many sons of her brother and got his nomination approved before breathing her last.

With the same spirit of revolt another brave soul, Kayya, the favourite wife of King Harsha, refused to die a miserable death on the pyre when several other queens cremated themselves with the dead body of the king. She went one better ; for, soon

[12] Op. cit, VII, 964s.
[13] Op. cit, VII, 477s, 478s, 1380s, VIII, 2336s.
[14] Op. cit, VII, 725s. VIII 2388s.

after the death of Harsha, she married a subordinate official of the government and lived peacefully to the consternation of the orthodox sections. The great historian who could not rise above the prejudice of his own time, at any rate in this respect, disapprovingly observed recording the incident : "But Kayya, the favourite mistress of King Harsha, disgraced entire womankind. If she did not remember that the lord had conferred on her the premier rank among all the mistresses let that pass—she who was sprung from a low family forgot it ; what causes us pain is that after residing in Vijaykshetra, in course of time, she should have accepted the position of the mistress of a village official."[15]

But, despite the heinous custom of sati and ban on remarriage of widows, a Hindu woman had the right to freely choose her own partner in life. The institution of *swayamvara* was as well known in Kasamir as in the rest of India. How far it obtained in the lower classes is controversial ; but among the higher castes and wealthy sections, especially the Rajputs, it was a common practice. Love marriages are frequently mentioned in the annals and other literary works. A woman also enjoyed the right of separation and if dissatisfied with the marriage on rational grounds she could, through mutual agreement with her husband, obtain a decree of divorce. Such a course was neither disapproved nor looked down upon. Even kings are known to have married divorced women and the progeny of such marriages have subsequently ruled the land as monarchs in their hereditary right. The most distinguished of the Hindu rulers, Lalitaditya Mukhtapida, and his brother Chandrapida who succeeded him, were King Pratapaditya's sons by a divorcee, a banya woman. It is, however, important to remember that cases of divorce or remarriage of widows were exceptions than the rule in ancient Hindu society. A peculiar thing which will surely grate in the ears of modern Hindus was the disregard of the rules ef marriage as they obtained among Hindus in other parts of India. Aryanised Turks as the kings of Kashmir were, they had scant regard for such rules. King Sussala chose a bride and accepted her younger sister as his daughter-in-law. Similarly, King Jai Simha gave one of his daughters in marriage to the Khasha chief of Rajapuri and another to the chief's son.

Birth, caste or sex do not appear to have been insurmountable obstacles to advancement of women in old Kashmir. Even untouchability was no bar. Accomplishment in fine arts of

[15] Op. cit, VII, 727s.

singing and dancing, adroit manipulation of statecraft or skilfulness in mediation and negotiation, and, above all, personal beauty have brought women to the fore and raised them to the status of queens, army commanders and diplomats. After having attained any exalted position many of them have generally been able to maintain balance and prove their worth. Few have challenged their authority with impunity. Bewitched by her enchanting looks King Chakravarman (923—933) A.D. married an untouchable domba girl and made her his premier queen who enjoyed the privilege among the royal ladies of being fanned by the yak tail. Not only her orders but also the instructions of her domba kith and kin were obeyed like royal commands and were not transgressed by any one. Kalhana relates that she entered the most sacred temple of Ranasvamin to which, followed by the feudatory chiefs, she paid a visit in state.[16] We may safely conclude that in ancient and early Middle Ages the Kashmiri women enjoyed sufficient freedom though they also suffered certain unbearable disabilities.

In the middle of the fourteenth century or, more precisely, in the year of Christian Era 1339, the last of the Hindu rulers who was significantly a woman, Kotadevi, was deposed by the alien upstart Shah Mir, an influential Muslim courtier, who thereafter ascended the throne. The sensitive queen unable to endure the disgrace ended her wretched life by committing suicide. The deposition and death of Kota did not prove an incident like so many other similar incidents in the lives of several rulers of the times. It was frought with great historical moment of far-reaching consequences. Among other things it hastened the end of a glorious institution. With Kota's death not only did Hindu rule come to a close ; it also entailed loss of the special status enjoyed by the queens and of the freedom of women in general.

It may be debatable whether Hinduism or Islam confers greater rights and privileges on women ; of the two codes of law which is more liberal towards them—Shariat or Dharma Shastra ? This is neither the place nor the occasion to enter into an academic discussion on the subject; besides, it is futile for our purpose. Nevertheless, it may be candidly admitted that with the establishment and consolidation of the Muslim rule in the valley women were gradually and increasingly deprived of those rights and privileges which they had acquired and enjoyed for many centuries, may be thousands of years. Almost throughout

[16] Op. cit., V, 387s.

the long course of their history until the middle of the fourteenth century, they took no inconspicuous part in the civil administration. In days of need and emergency, they joined the armed forces of the land; they functioned as leaders of religious thought and as diplomats and politicians; they achieved reputation as builders and artistes. Undoubtedly, the happy period for women as for the people in general, was that when the country came under the sway of Buddhism, but the privileges earned under the impact of the libertarian creed could not be taken away by the reactionary regimes which were set up on the revival of the brahmanical reaction. With the downfall of the Hindu rule and capture of power by Shah Mir, however, the social fabric underwent a complete change.

Elsewhere, I have discussed in what ways Islam benefited the Kashmiris, politically as well as culturally, and how under the Muslim rulers progress and prosperity were restored and the indigenous culture of the valley regenerated.[17] In one respect this resurgence remained incomplete. The decline of the Hindu rule after King Avantivarman (855—883 A.D.) had given a setback to the advancement of women; indeed they had already been crippled in several respects when the Hindu Raj came to an end. But it was left to the Muslim rule to incapacitate them and oust them from all fields of public life. After Kotadevi no Kashmiri woman ascended the throne though, as we shall see presently, they continued to possess the qualities of governing a country, supervising an administration and of commanding an army. Nor were Kashmiri queens any more crowned, annointed or sprinkled with the sacred water side by side with the kings on the day of coronation. A Muslim *begum* did not share the throne with her husband; there could be no question of having her own councillors; she had no separate treasure. A few Muslim queens have certainly exerted influence on the administration and tried to direct the tide of events, for good or for evil; but this they did through sheer force of personality or as a privilege granted by love-lorn, good-natured or weakling husbands. By law, custom or tradition, the Muslim queens enjoyed no right of interference and no authority to meddle in the affairs of state.

Generally, queens under the Muslim rule were relegated to

[17] Vide Prem Nath Bazaz, "Cultural Resurgence Under Muslim Rule", in *The History of Struggle For Freedom in Kashmir*, (Kashmir Publishing Co., New Delhi), pp. 81-110.

the domestic sphere and confined to the harem. They rarely appeared in public and seldom contacted officers to keep themselves informed of the currents and cross-currents in state politics. They were expected to be devoted wives, giving comfort to their husbands and procreating children for the perpetuation of the royal dynasty; the administration and governance of the country were none of their concern. The Muslim queens lived in anonymity; even the names of most of them are unknown to history. Very little, if anything at all, has been recorded about the lives of those whom the contemporary chroniclers cared to mention in their annals. While during the Hindu period every page of history is almost equally filled with narratives of the adventures and exploits of kings and queens, reference to begums and their activities in the chronicles of the Muslim period are few and far between.

Loss of rights and privileges was but a part of the injustice that women had to suffer after the downfall and death of Kota. Under the pernicious influence of religious zealots and bigotted preachers who poured into the valley in large numbers at the accession of Sikandar *But Shikan* (1389—1413 A.D.) the soul-killing system of purdah, unknown to the Kashmiris, was introduced and at the behests of *mullahs* and *waizes* women began to be screened and secluded. The Muslim women of wealthier sections and high pedigree were first to be victimised; they went behind the veil. In imitation of the ruling classes or under fear of molestation, the Hindu ladies of equal status followed suit. Gone were the days when women of cultured, wealthy and prosperous families stood cheek by jowl with their menfolk in the royal palaces, at market places, in temples, on battle fields, in convents, at public thoroughfares and in religious and social gatherings. The women forgot all about their personal adornment; they dressed shabbily just to hide their nakedness and with no idea to appear graceful; for to look handsome and be known for bodily charms was unwomanly; the arts of music and dancing were considered as quite unfit for respectable girls, and were practised only by low-caste women and prostitutes. Now the dignity and safety of a lady lay in being secluded, veiled and unseen by men other than the nearest kin; their sole meaning and purpose in life was to keep the homes, to gratify the desires of their husbands and to procreate children. The process of humiliation reached farthest limits under the Afghans. It is the unanimous verdict of all Kashmir chroniclers that under these

barbarian rulers (1752—1819 A.D.) the valley witnessed the darkest period of national depression. Though men and women were, without distinction, subjected to hardship by the Afghan tyrant, women became special targets of his licentious behaviour. No handsome or youthful maiden was safe from the grasping clutches of an Afghan governor or his lawless underlings if he desired to have her for the satisfaction of his carnal desires. Nothing could prevent the ruffian from taking possession of her body; and his word was the law of the land. Notwithstanding her heart-rending cries and the pathetic wailings of the parents and neighbours, good-looking virgins and handsome married women were forcibly captured and kidnapped and despatched to Kabul as presents to friends and compatriots. In such distressing and agonising conditions, to talk of freedom would be mockery. Its last shreds disappeared and the practice of purdah was more rigorously enforced by the terrified people. No wonder that within a score of years of the Afghan rule Kashmiri women were physically and spiritually shattered; their presence in every sphere of social activity was totally eclipsed.

The long traditions of freedom or slavery die hard; once a people get innured to liberty or to thraldom, it is not easy to deprive them of the one or to eradicate the other. The Kashmiri women had enjoyed sufficient liberty for countless years. The process to curb her must have been slow and tortuous, and the struggle on her part to resist, hard and grim. It is difficult to believe that the proud women would meekly submit to the expropriation. The Muslim queens who generally came from outside families, might willingly accept to live in seclusion and be happy with their lot in the seraglio; upper class ladies might be forced to go behind the veil when moving outside the precincts of their inner apartments; but there can be no doubt that the women of the middle and the lower classes, of peasantry and labouring multitude, who formed the preponderant majority, put up a bold front, resisted to the last and refused to yield. Even when such heroic souls voluntarily embraced Islam or were converted through coercion to the new faith, they courageously stood by their ancient right to move about openly and freely. Throughout the past six centuries, and indeed to this day, these brave women have continued their epic struggle and held aloft the banner of freedom with phenomenal success. No woman of the working classes, be she toiling in the fields, assisting in a shop or functioning in any other capacity, has recognised the

institution of purdah. Even the ferocity of the Afghans failed to cow them down. A Kashmiri woman had lost much at the close of the last century; her old rights and prerogatives had become extinct; she was no more educated; she had ceased to dabble in politics and took no part in public affairs; she was denied the pleasure of singing, dancing and other creative arts of self-expression, but even in such pitiable and helpless condition she preserved the right of free movement. G. T. Vigne who travelled extensively over India in the first half of the last century and had the opportunity to see Kashmiri women in 1835 A.D. when they were reduced to wretchedness, writes: "In Kashmir there is no purdah, or concealement of the features, excepting among the higher classes."[18] So when queens and ladies of the upper strata surrendered before the fanaticism of men, the women of the lower classes tenaciously stuck to their resolve of defending their right of freedom, however restricted. Little wonder that it was in these classes that heroines were born during the Middle Ages. Lalla and Arnimal, Habba and Farzi to name only four of the known celebrities who stand above the rest in stature and who achieved undying fame in philosophy, in poetry and in politics sprang from no soil of respectibility but were the progeny of poor, toiling parents.

While bemoaning the lot of Kashmiri women under the Muslim rulers we must be grateful to Islam for the blessings which it conferred on them. It was the humanist element in the philosophy of the new faith and the liberal outlook of certain *sultans* which saved the women from the horrors of the inhuman practices upheld by the Hindu society. Curiously enough, in the beginning under the influence of the prevailing custom in the Hindu majority, upper class Muslim women too committed self-immolation and hundreds destroyed themselves as satis; or probably even after conversion to Islam women were disallowed to live after the death of their husbands. Both the Shah Miri sultans and the Chak monarchs who ruled the valley after them, were either indifferent to it or failed in their attempts to suppress the horrible practice. They no doubt disapproved of it, but took no drastic steps to end it. Akbar had forbidden the performance of sati in India, but he too was unsuccessful to eradicate the practice in Kashmir after he annexed the valley in 1586 A.D. to his empire. It was finally abolished

[18] G. T. Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak, Iskardu*, Vol. II, (Henry Colburn, London, 1842), p. 143.

by Jehangir that great lover of beauties, including the beauty of human form. A shiver passed through the Emperor's spine when he heard, while on his way to Kashmir through the often-trodden route of Pir Panjal, that Muslim widows in Rajouri were consigned to the flames with the remains of their husbands. Royal commands were immediately issued prohibiting the noxious practice. Jehangir was particular to see that his orders were actually carried out and subsequently made enquires about it. Dr. Sufi states that the number of Muslim girls cremated at one time was no fewer than 4,000 in Rajauri and Bhimber.[19]

Islam blessed Kashmiri women in other ways too. Re-marriage of widows was introduced to the relief of thousands; the right of separation and divorce, though still hedged by various restrictions, and the right to inherit a moiety of ancestral property, were acquired by women as a rule under the Shariat. To be sure, Hindu women continued to be governed by their personal laws but since the majority of the population was converted to Islam most women benefited by the liberalism of the Muslim Law.

The Sikhs who succeeded the Afghans as the rulers of the valley proved no less tyrannical and cruel. For the brief period of twenty-seven years (1819—1846 A.D.) when they occupied the lovely country their sole desire was to despoil the impoverished Kashmiris and denude the land of the little wealth that its people still possessed. When the Dogras obtained Kashmir in 1846 A.D. as a gift from the advancing British in lieu of a paltry sum of rupees seventy-five lakhs, they were called upon to solve numerous social, political and economic problems. But the new masters bent their energies partly to terrorise the harassed Kashmiris and partly to annex the frontier areas lying in the north. Busy in consolidating the new gains, the Dogras dismissed all thought of reform and reconstruction from their mind. They evinced little or no interest in the moral and social uplift of their subjects, at any rate for several decades after the occupation of the valley. At the close of the last century, therefore, Kashmiri women had sunk to a low level of destitution and ignorance. They had lost charms of body and refinements of mind; they lacked self-confidence, spirit of revolt and even a sense of righteous indignation.

But the wave of Western ideas which had slowly but steadily

[19] Dr. G. M. D. Sufi, *Kashir*, Vol. I, (University of the Punjab, Lahore, 1949), pp. 262-63.

advanced in the wake of British domination to every corner of the sub-continent began to have its impact on the politics and culture of God-forsaken Kashmir. The British authorities had gradually become aware of the strategic importance, the scenic beauties and the salubrious climate of the valley; they deeply regretted their decision to bestow the precious gift on the Dogras in a hurry and in ignorance. Afraid lest the greater knowledge about Kashmir excites the avarice of the British and their desire to retake the valley, the Dogras sealed the country and reluctantly allowed any European to enter it. No white man could remain in the valley in winter months till the death of Maharaja Ranbir Singh in 1885 A.D.; even the Christian missionaries were seldom granted permission to stay on for a whole year. It was however not easy to hoodwink John Bull. At the accession of Pratap Singh, the third ruler of the Dogra dynasty, occurred a big change. For reasons good and bad, the suzerain power reduced the new Maharaja to the position of a nominal prince, a figure head of the government. The British Residency took over charge of the entire administration and introduced vast administrative, educational and economic reforms under its supervision. This opened a new era of progress in the annals of the land; it ushered in the dawn of modernism in the State; the slumbering Kashmiris reawakened; and the women, too, began to open their eyes, recover lost ground and regain their innate virtues.

The honour of pioneering a movement for rehabilitating Kashmiri women, for initiating them into the arts of civilisation and for rekindling in them of the desire to live, must go to the foreign Christian mission. In the teeth of ferocious opposition from both the obscurantist government of the Dogras and the superstitious elders of the Hindu and Muslim communities, the noble missionaries, with amazing fortitude, forbearance and patience undertook the most arduous task of educating teen-aged girls. Constant failures did not daunt them and personal risks did not deter them. Every defeat was a challenge and an invitation to make fresh efforts. After many years of ceaseless toil some pioneer lady missionaries were successful in getting a school established in Srinagar where a few tiny girls came to learn the three R's. Having thus removed the impediments, the path was cleared for Kashmiri patriots to travel with less difficulty and render help to the women in their onward march towards the goal of liberation.

As elsewhere in India, men took less noisesomely, though not without opposition, to Western education in Kashmir. When in the second decade of the present century batches of young men adorned with the University degrees came out of the portals of the S.P. College to taste the rough and tumble of existence, it dawned on them that the real progress of the community and the country was difficult of achievement until women were equally educated and trained to face the problems of life. For years a fierce controversy raged on the subject of women's position and role in society, and the equipment she needed to bring felicity into the domestic world. It was, however, only in 1926 that an earnest movement was launched on a national scale for the uplift of women. A few years earlier the Kashmir Government had no doubt turned its attention to the girls educatian. But for various reasons its efforts bore little fruit. Accustomed to burying their own girls at their birth, the Dogra Rajputs could never bring themselves round to exalt women of other communities, much less of subject peoples. But Western ideas were making a headway and opening the flood-gates of social revolution; the Maharaja was powerless to stem the on-rushing tide. In the fateful year 1926 a non-official organisation was found with the laudable object of improving the mental and material conditions of the Kashmiri women; it was called the women's Welfare Trust. Though the beginning was humble, the Trust achieved a phenomenal success within a few years. Simultaneously, through the efforts of some non-Dogra Ministers coupled with the assistance of enlightened patriots the more formidable difficulties were gradually overcome and an increasing number of girls sought admission in the government schools.

Today the forces that thwarted the movement for the advancement of women lie frustrated and demoralised if not altogether vanquished. Those who cannot endure to see women standing side by side with men in different walks of life are sulking in their homes hardly venturing to oppose female education publicly. The objective of freedom is still far distant though no longer out of sight. The liberation of India from the foreign rule in 1947 has raised new hopes in the minds of women. The changes effected in the old laws and customs governing the status and rights of Hindu women by the Indian Parliament are a landmark in the social history of the country. The Kashmiri women too have benefited by the new code which was adopted by the State Legislature. But the Women

continue to suffer manifold disabilities. Though certain legislations have been passed, certain others remain to be put on the statute book to give the women their rightful place in the society which history and democracy entitles them to have; public opinion in the valley lacks that intense sympathy with and high appreciation for the ideal without which it cannot be speedily and fully attained. All the same, it must be a source of great satisfaction to any well-wisher of the country that Kashmiri women are steadily coming into their own. They are functioning as teachers, doctors, nurses and officials in and outside their homeland; they have joined the National Cadet Corps; they are progressively participating in politics; and they are flowering into amateur writers and poets. For the first time after centuries the women have altogether discarded purdah, though, regrettably, many upper class and educated Muslims still adhere to it. Some of the women have earned reputation in the professions of teaching and medicine; a few are learning the fine arts of singing, music and dancing. Given encouragement and opportunity, there is every reason to believe that Kashmiri women will give a good account of themselves and attain the position to which they are entitled by past history and modern conception of liberty.

CHAPTER TWO

CELEBRATED HINDU QUEENS-REGNANT

SOME years before the great war of Mahabharata was waged on the plain of Kurukshetra, Kashmir was ruled by King Gonanda. He was a powerful monarch with a big army whose friendship was fondly desired by other rulers in North India. One of these, Jarasanda, well-known to the students of the epic, *Mahabharata*, was a relative of Gonanda. The former had developed hostility towards Krishna of Mathura which ended in a war between the two. Jarasanda approached Gonanda for help and the king of Kashmir unmindful of the consequences forthwith proceeded at the head of large troops to the scene of the battle. The Kashmir army laid a seige to Mathura and fought bravely against the enemy. It was a fierce fight in which the fate of the combatants remained undecided for a time. Krishna invoked the help of his brother Balrama and when the latter's forces joined the enemy his position enormously strengthened; the scales were titled against Jarasanda and his ally; the Kashmir armies were vanquished and Gonanda was slain on the battle field.

When the defeated commanders returned to their homeland followed by the few surviving troops and reported the sorrowful death of their king, Gonanda's son Damodara was crowned as the next master of Kashmir. The land was "furnished in plenitude with life's enjoyments"[1] but the new king felt aggrieved on account of the defeat of the army and the slaughter of his father on the battle field. From the very day of his coronation he constantly thought of avenging himself. It so happened that the king of Gandhara notified to the royal clans the holding of *swayamvara* of his handsome,

[1] *Rajatarangini*, Taranga I, 65s.

young princess to which Krishna, like all other distinguished Indian princes of the time, was also invited. Damodara would not allow this opportunity to slip out of his grasp. Recklessly, he attacked the marching forces of Mathura and Krishna's entourage when they were not far off from the border of his kingdom. But Damodara's adventure proved as ill-fated as the enterprise of his father. He fought valiantly but was surrounded by the more daring and stronger forces of the enemy. Many of his troops were put to sword and he himself fell fighting like a brave Kshitriya warrior.

(1) Yashovati

Damodara was young and without a child at the time of his death; there was no heir-apparent to the throne. His consort Yashovati, however, was enceinte. Some of the disloyal ministers of the State were filled with covetousness and attempted to capture power and seize the crown. But the dowager queen braved the opposition and with the support of loyal officials and the consent of devoted people, ascended the throne. Krishna also advocated her cause and advised the rebellious ministers to surrender. Yashovati was duly annointed by the Brahmans with the sacred water and recognised as the queen-regnant of the land.

It is not known how long Yashovati ruled over Kashmir; even the exact date or year of her ascension has not been recorded by any historian. But the period she remained on the throne could not have been a very long one because it is stated that soon after the birth of her son, the famous Gonanda II, the Brahmans performed for him the *jatakarma* and other rites together with his coronation and incidental ceremonies. Yashovati continued to be the *de facto* ruler of the kingdom. For, so long as the infant king did not attain majority she had to look after the affairs of state as the regent. It was during the days of her regency that the epic war of Mahabharata was fought between the Kauravas and the Pandavas with their respective allies on either side. The absence ot Kashmir armies in that gigantic clash has thus been explained as due to the fact that the king of the country was in a state of minority and had not, therefore, been invited as an ally in the war either by the Kauravas or by the Pandavas.

Whether as the sovereign queen ruling in her own right or as the regent administering the country on behalf of her

son, Yashovati, according to the ancient chronicles, proved a successful and popular ruler who fully understood her duties and efficiently discharged the responsibilities entrusted to her care. She was celebrated for the nobility of her character and purity of her views. The death of two successive monarchs on the battlefield and destruction of large forces in the two battles had thrown the administration out of gear, but the prudent and the determined queen restored stability and normalcy through sheer force of her personality. No detailed account of the queen's activities has been preserved but it is known that those who were prone to disbelieve that a woman could possess the intelligence and energy to rule competently over a realm, had to admit that they were wrong. Those who came to scoff at the court of the queen remained behind to pay unstinted tributes to her virtues. In the words of Kalhana, "the eyes of men which viewed womankind with scant courtesy considering it as one of the objects of their pleasure looked upon this mother of her subjects as if she were a goddess."[2]

(2) Sugandhadevi

Although after the death of Yashovati, Kashmir queens continued to take earnest, lively and by no means an insignificant part in the administration of the country and social life of the people, no princess got an opportunity for many centuries to rule in her own right as sovereign of the State. It was only at the beginning of the tenth century A.D. that, forced by the chaotic conditions of her times, the dowager queen of Shankaravarman ascended the throne and took the reins of government into her hands.

Avantivarman (855—883 A.D.) was one of the noble and great, if not the greatest, monarchs under whom the valley achieved unprecedented material prosperity. To this day his reign is remembered as a heavenly blessing by the Kashmiris when they could secure the necessities of life for the mere asking. It was in the days of this benevolent monarch that big projects to irrigate barren areas and to reclaim swampy and marshy lands were planned and executed. Avantivarman successfully banished poverty and scarcity from the Valley ; his regime has been deservedly celebrated as the golden age by the ancient writers and chroniclers.

Avantivarman was succeeded by his son Shankaravarman,

[2] Ibid, I, 73s.

who, unlike his father, cherished an irrepressible desire to subjugate foreign lands and bring all neighbouring chiefs under his domination. In March 902 A.D., he invaded the territories situated on the banks of the river Sindhu (Indus) in the north-west of Kashmir. In this expedition Shankaravarman was accompanied by Sugandha, his beloved and senior queen. The campaign was successful, and after conquering the territories while returning to his homeland the king received the obeisance of all the terror-stricken chiefs on the way. But at Urasa there arose a quarrel between his commanders and the innabitants of the place on the ground of billets. It is said that in the tumult which ensued a low-caste warrior discharged an arrow which, unawares, pierced the neck of King Shankaravarman and caused his instantaneous death.

Queen Sugandha, the ministers accompanying the expedition and the commanders of the army were placed in a quandry at the unexpected and tragic death of the king. There was the imminent danger of the chief of Urasa attacking them ; they had still to pass through certain hostile areas and since the awe of the powerful personality of Shankaravarman had disappeared they began to feel deeply perplexed. It was through the ingenuity of Sugandha that the situation was saved. The sagacious queen quickly discerned that the safety of the Kashmiris lay in suppressing the report of the king's death. She managed to make it known in the unfriendly quarters that Shankaravarman was alive though slightly bruised. Then with ropes as in a mechanism capable of lowering and raising it, the queen made the head of the dead king return the salute of the feudatories who approached the royal procession.

Sure of his sudden end, the mortally wounded Shankaravarman had, while life was not yet extinct in his body, in a feeble voice given his minor son, Gopalavarman, into the charge of Queen Sugandha and commanded her to instal him on the throne. On arrival at the capital, and having performed the last rites of the deceased in a befitting manner, the devoted queen faithfully carried out the behests, and Gopalavarman was duly crowned under her guardianship.

Nominally, the minor prince was the ruler of Kashmir but in reality the whole brunt of administration was borne by Sugandha. Besides being an energetic administrator she was a gay queen who took equal pleasure in the performance of state duties and bodily indulgences. She fell passionately in love

with Minister Prabhakara who was incharge of the treasury. The feudatory chief of Udabhandpura (modern O hind), thinking that the Kashmir Government had weakened after the death of Shankaravarman, flouted the authority of the suzerain power. Enraged by the chief's disloyalty, Sugandha dispatched an army under the command of Prabhakara to bring the dislayal chief to book. The rebel was easily routed in a battle. He was deposed and the reconquered territory was bestowed on one Tormana son of Lalliya who was proclaimed the new feudatory by the Kashmiri Commander.

The incident enormously raised the prestige of Prabhakara at the court and, being a paramour of the queen, he began to give airs to himself. Soon, he started misusing his newly acquired power which turned many people into his enemies. He was accused of misappropriating and embezzling the queen's money from the treasury. He disdained to reply and out of vanity he disgraced and abused many courtiers when they declined to do his bidding. King Gopalavarman disliked the behaviour of the arrogant minister and took him to task for looting the state coffers. Alarmed by the threatening attitude of the king, the vindictive minister hatched a conspiracy and got Gopalavarman assassinated by one Ramdeva after he had been on the throne hardly for two years. No one has accused Sugandha of any part in the foul play of the wicked minister. It seems that the queen was quite ignorant of the plot and she was made to believe that the young king died of natural causes.

Gopalavarman was succeeded by his younger brother Samkata who was a delinquent child and brought to the throne literally from the streets, but the poor boy lost his life in ten days. With him ended the line of Shankaravarman as there was no male survivor of the family. This led to uncertainty about the future and became a cause of widespread restlessness. Designing politicians were not wanting and there was no dearth of self-seekers who were ready to fish in the troubled waters. But, before the situation was allowed to aggravate, influential representatives of the public opinion acted and a meeting of the people was called to choose the future ruler of the country. It speaks of the popularity of Sugandha that in this public gathering she was unanimously voted to the throne. Says Kalhana: "Upon the prayer of the subjects Sugandha assumed royal authority in person."[3] She was rewarded for her services to the country which she had

[3] Ibid., V, 243b.

rendered as the Regent ; she was loved by the people, trusted by the courtiers and admired by the army.

But the story of Sugandha has a tragic ending. There were factions among the politicians and the state administration was infested with intriguers and conspirators. The League of the Tantrin Infantry was a formidable body which was able to punish and favour kings. Another faction was of the Ekangas (Royal bodyguards) who also wielded enormous influence and power. Besides, several nobles and feudal lords with wavering loyalty had their own troops. It was the fear of the king, secure on his throne, which kept these factions under control and preserved law and order in the country. Nothing could save Kashmir from falling into confusion when the iron hand of the king was removed. Fully aware of the existence of disruptive forces, Sugandha was reluctant to assume the responsibilities of a ruler. After the death of Shankaravarman she preferred to function as the regent and placed her sons Gopalavarman and Samkata on the throne one after the other ; but neither of them survived for long. Then, at the call of the country she saw no alternative but to accept sovereign authority and wear the diadem.

In the beginning, the Tantrins remained friendly, and the Ekangas were also sincerely devoted to Sugandha. So the affairs of the state were conducted smoothly and the peace-loving people felt relieved. The queen bended her energies in implementing various plans of reconstruction. She had drawn ambitious schemes to build towns and edifices. But barely a couple of years had passed when the mischievous Tantrins started to give her trouble. They did not like to see a woman efficiently and successfully running the machinery of the government and waxing powerful amidst them. Probably they apprehended their own eclipse or destruction at her hands. Sugandha tried to take wind out of the Tantrin sails. She decided to abdicate and put a prince of royal birth on the throne with herself to guide him from behind the scenes. Freed from the encumbrances of sovereign power, she thought, she would be able to withstand the opposition of the unfriendly sections among the troops and the courtiers.

As there was no male survivor in the line of Shankaravarman, Sugandha's choice fell on one Nirjitavarman "born of a lady from her own family who, she thought, would be complaisant to her from affection for the relationship."[4] Before announ-

[4] Ibid., V, 251-252s

cing her momentous decision the queen fully observed the constitutional conventions and took precautions to make her plan acceptable to different parties and influential individuals. "She summoned for consultation the ministers, the grandees, the Tantrins and the Ekangas".[5] But when the nomination of Nirjitavarman was made public the Tantrins opposed her on the ground that "the nominated man was a debauchee and was so addicted to sensual pleasures that he could hardly rise from his bed even during the day time; for that reason he was nicknamed 'the lame' "[6].

Nirjitavarman was no doubt a man of blamable character and unworthy of the great honour that Sugandha wanted to bestow on him. But hostility of the Tantrins sprang not from his choice as the future monarch but from the enmity that they bore towards Minister Prabhakara who had humiliated them on several occasions. Finding that the people were divided on the nomination of Nirjitavarman, the Tantrins opposed the queen with the purpose of destroying her together with her paramour. The Tantrins declared their preference for the ten-year old Partha, Nirjitavarman's son, and on the strength of their armed might crowned him the king. Shorn of power, Sugandha who was never happy on the throne, left the capital and went to live in peace at the flourishing town of Hushakpura (modern Ushukur near Baramulla).

Seldom can a man or woman retire from active politics and be at peace while his or her supporters and opponents are still grappling with each other. The loyal and devoted Ekangas would not yield. Forming a united front with other sections faithful to the ex-queen, they successfully persuaded Sugandha to lead them against the new government. A furious battle was fought in April 914 A.D. on the suburbs of Srinagar. The Tantrins proved too formidable and won the day; the Ekangas were routed and Sugandha was captured alive by her enemies. They imprisoned her in the Nishapalaka Vihara where she breathed her last after remaining for some years in the miserable state of captivity.

Sugandha was not destined to rule for a long time. The decline of the Hindu polity had set in, and more resourceful princes than she were unable to cope with the difficulties of the period. Despite her heroic endeavours to restore order, to

[5] Ibid., V, 250s

[6] Ibid., V, 253-54s

organise the government on stable foundations and to regain prosperity for the people, she could not remain in power for more than two years. During this brief interval (904-906 A.D.) Sugandha founded a town Gopalapura in memory of her son and another in her own name. She also founded Gopala Convent for the benefit of scholars and students. A magnificent temple, Gopala Keshav, was constructed by her, the ruins of which may still be witnessed on the outskirts of Pattan sixteen miles from Srinagar on the Jhelum Valley Road.

(3) Didda The Terrible

Less than half a century after the tragic death of the heroic Sugandha there appeared another queen on the throne of Kashmir. Her name was Didda. By now political conditions had further deteriorated and cultural degeneration had set in at the Kashmir court.

In 950 A.D. a drunkard, Kshemagupta, became the ruler of the valley. He was of a mean nature and felt pleasure in the company of wicked men. He was addicted to the vices of dice, liquor and women. A hundred villainous sycophants led by one Phalguna attended upon him. In the days of this monarch the Kashmir court was "replete with herlots, knaves, imbeciles and corruptors of boys."[6] There was no place for high minded men, scholars or thinkers in the king's assembly. He used to spit on the beards of the venerable and hurled abuses into their ears and blows on their skulls.

It is important to keep this sombre picture of the times in mind while making an appraisal of Didda's work.

Didda was lame, but the beauty of her face and the grace of her form were enchanting. Kshemagupta was enamoured of her and fell so deeply in love that after marriage he got totally absorbed in her to the exclusion of most other objects of interest. For this "he came to be known among the people by the humiliating epithet of 'Didda Kshema'."[7] Perceiving the love-lorn nature of the king, Didda gradually assumed the control of administration and in course of time her potentialities to handle the starecraft were fully unfolded. Though Kshemagupta continued to be on the throne till 958 A.D., it was Didda who ran the government and attended to every detail of the administration. She was in direct charge of the civil depart-

[6] Ibid., VI, 157s.
[7] Ibid., VI, 177s.

ments as well as the armed forces; nothing could be done without her consent and permission; she was the real power in the kingdom.

Freed from kingly responsibilities, Kshemagupta grew more licentious, wanton and uncontrollable in his vulgar habits. After a short reign of eight years, mostly spent in debauchery and caddish merriment, he was seized by a virulent skin disease called *luta* which hastened his permature death.

In accordance with the custom of the times, Didda wanted to cremate herself with the dead body of Kshemagupta along with several other queens, and, as a matter of fact, she had ordered all the preparations for so doing after securing the necessary permission of the Premier Phalguna. But Narvahana, a prudent minister of the State, who realised the value of Didda's services to the people and what she was capable of doing for their welfare, dissuaded her from ending her life. Didda agreed and changed her mind.

Kshemagupta was succeeded by his infant son Abhimanyu who was installed on the throne under the guardianship of the queen-mother Didda.

The change demanded greater capacity on the part of the dowager queen to efficiently run the administration. She could not succeed until she had enlisted the willing co-operation of all the ministers and councillors. Narvahana was the most devoted and sincere of them all. But the afore-mentioned circumstances under which Didda decided against becoming a sati created suspicions in her mind about Premier Phalguna. Mischief-mongers too poisoned her ears and she was made to believe that the Prime Minister wanted her to die in order that he could usurp the kingdom. Even during the life-time of Kshemagupta Didda bore a grudge against Phalguna for he had given his own beautiful daughter in marriage to the king. Now the enmity deepened and the queen-mother would not tolerate the Prime Minister near the throne. Phalguna was an enlightened statesman endowed with qualities of heroism, vitality and foresight, which made him an eye-sore to his rivals. Coming to know by indications that Didda bore malice against him he left the capital and went to Parnotsa (Poonch) with a large number of troops. Revengeful Didda did not hesitate to despatch men to assassinate him. Thus insulted and incensed he returned to Baramulla where he collected sufficient forces to challenge Didda. At this turn of events the queen-mother and her council-

lors were frightened. Finally, either through the dexterous negotiations of Didda or through his own sense of loyalty to the crown, Phalguna abandoned his plan to attack Srinagar and laid down his arms in the temple of Varaha.

Hardly had the battle cries from the side of Phalguna died down when another danger raised its vicious head in the capital. There were two princes of royal blood—Mahiman and Patala—residing in the palace who hatched a conspiracy to dethrone the infant king, turn out the dowager queen and capture power for themselves. But the ever-vigilant Didda getting the scent of the sedition ordered the banishment of the conspirators from the country. Mahiman immediately repaired to the house of his father-in-law Shaktisena, an influential grandee, to hide himself. The official appointed to execute the orders went there to serve them upon the accused. Shaktisena was offended at this and openly sided with his son-in-law. Thereafter, a powerful league was formed to spread the treasonous atmosphere and encourage people to rise in rebellion against Didda. Some feudal barons commanding their own contingents of troops joined the confederacy. Among them were Kimanaka, Mukula, Ermantaka of Parihaspura (modern Paraspur), Udayagupta and Yashodhara, the leader of the residents of Lalitadityapura (modern Litapura). At the commencement of the civil war which broke out soon, the ministers began to waver in their loyalty to the crown. Only Narvahana remained steadfast and did not forsake the cause of the queen-mother even for a day. This was the first critical period in the long life of Didda which tested her merits of forbearance, fortitude and statesmanship. As the events proved she rose equal to the occasion and scaled heights of diplomacy while dealing with the enemies and facing the odds.

The forces of the confederates advanced in array and easily entered the capital sure of their triumph ; the situation was tense and few could predict the outcome of the tussle. Didda herself was much apprehensive and, therefore, ordered the boy-king, Abhimanyu, to be removed to the sanctuary of Shuramatha for safety. Then, girding up her loins, she took upon herself the responsibility of operations against the advancing rebels. The risks involved were enormous and there could be no doubt that she was endangering her own life. But in utter disregard of the consequences and unmindful of her personal safety she

appeared on the battlefield determined either to vanquish the enemies or get herself destroyed.

Didda was not only valiant and brave ; she was also sagacious and fox-like. It was clear to her that she could not win by merely depending on her armed strength. She was conscious of the numerical superiority of the confederate forces. Therefore, she employed the weapon of diplomacy to frustrate the designs of the rebels. The participants in the league had sworn by sacred libation with the arch-conspirator Mahiman that if "anyone is attacked all should take up the offensive", but the clever Didda contrived to create a rift among them while they were on their way to the palace. By slyly offering some of them heaps of gold and much wealth she won over the greedy Brahmans of Lalitadityapura who were the mainstay of the principal participant Ermantaka. With the defection of the Brahmans the rebellion fizzled out and most of the enemy troops dispersed.

Didda's victory over the mighty forces of the conspirators amazed alike her friends and foes. Very few had expected that a lame woman could stand firmly and successfully against the onslaughts of influential men equally experienced in the arts of war and diplomacy. "She whom none believed had the strength to step over a cattle track", says Kalhana in his poetic style, "the lame lady traversed, in the manner of the son of the wind (Hanuman), the confederate forces".[1]

Resounding victory over the rebels did not make Didda vain or haughty nor did she become forgetful of the dangers by which she still continued to be surrounded. In the hour of glory she was fully conscious of the blessings of reconciliation. Opposition can be suppressed and silenced but not destroyed by violence ; the only way to put an end to it is to remove the genuine grievances of the opponents and to recognise their merit if they have any.

During the days of disturbances and while holding negotiations and diplomatic pourparlers with the ring leaders of the rebel confederacy, Didda had found that, of them all, Yashodara was a man of valour and if tactfully dealt with he could prove useful in the service of the State. She straightaway invited him and ordered his appointment as Supreme Commander of the army and other defence forces. That she had not erred in her judge-

[1] Ibid., VI, 226 B.

ment became manifest when, soon after, the loyalty and merit of Yashodara were put to test.

Shahi Thakkana, Ruler of Udabhandpura, displayed signs of insubordination towards the suzerain power. Didda directed the Supreme Commander to proceed in person at the head of the Kashmir Army and subdue him. Yashodara swooped down upon the territory like a hawk and at one stroke defeated Thakanna and brought him to his knees. But in accordance with the generous policy pursued by Didda towards vanquished foes, the Supreme Commander reinstated the fallen ruler before returning to his homeland.

Didda was naturally happy at the outcome of the operations against the ruler of Udabhandpura but some of her wicked courtiers who disliked the rise of Yashodhara and treated him as their rising rival, fabricated unfounded charges against the Supreme Commander. A report was made to her that Yashodhara had extracted bribes from Thakanna for re-installing him on the throne. It was the great desire of Didda to eradicate corruption in all its forms and purify the administration of all evils. But, rather hurriedly and foolishly, she believed the words of the malicious courtiers and without instituting proper inquiries into the matter she decided to punish the Supreme Commander by banishing him. Returning triumphant, Yashodhara had expected a grand reception to himself, but on hearing of his impending exile as punishment instead, his wrath knew no bounds. It did not take him many days to collect the insurrectionary elements and rehoist the banner of revolt. This time it proved more threatening than on the previous occasion. The rebel forces reached the lion gate of the palace in a short duration and the end of Didda seemed at hand.

But the intrepid queen remained undaunted ; her presence of mind was amazing and nothing could disturb the aplomb and equipoise with which she surveyed the onrushing, furious tide that was dashing against the palace walls. As previously, she ordered the immediate removal of the boy-king Abhimanyu to a sanctuary, this time to Bhattarakamatha. Relieved of this anxiety she directed her physical and mental energies in achieving that which appeared impossible of attainment to all but herself. She was determined to crush the rebellion. Throwing a glance from a tower of the palace, she could not help perceiving that the royal armies were in disarray and there was hardly any chance for them to get in order. The rebels were advancing

step by step and nothing seemed to prevent them from battering the lion gate and entering the precincts of the palace.

At this crucial moment when the royal armies started fleeing in all directions, Didda commanded the Ekangas to form into a phalanx to defend the palace. She joined them in person. Heartened by the marvellous heroism of the queen-mother, the Ekangas stepped forth in martial array, stopped the panic-stricken royal troops from retreating and rolled back some of the contigents of the enemy forces. This turned the tide and within a short time the non-combatants, the onlookers and the sight-seers mobilised, and supporting the royal armies converted the defeat into a victory. Rajkula Bhatta, a general of the Royal Army, valorously penetrated through the ranks of the rebels which demoralised them ; the hostile forces ran helter-skelter and the rebels took to their heels. Himmaka was slain on the battle-field ; Yashodhara and Eramantaka were captured by the king's soldiers. Didda was less generous this time ; iron had begun to enter her soul ; her feelings had hardened ; and she punished all the imprisoned rebel leaders as suited her purpose. Eramantaka was thrown into the Vitasta from a bridge with a big boulder tied round his neck.

This incident occurred in 962-63 A.D. and exposed the infirmities of the body-politic. A keen observer like Didda could not fail to see that the foundations of the State were being undermined and only a complete overhaul of the administration could set the matters right, meet the needs of the time and be conducive to the progress and prosperity of the kingdom. For more than sixty years several big functionaries of the State including certain ministers and feudal lords, had formed a pernicious habit of playing with the lives of the kings and the interests of the people, and nobody had been able to control or oust them. It was left to Didda to rid the soil of Kashmir of this malignant growth. Says Kalhana : "Those perfidious ministers who, formerly, since the year seventy-seven from the time of King Gopalavarman to Abhimanyu, had deprived sixteen kings during sixty years, of their glory, lives and treasure—all these together with their families and followers, by the terrible knitting of her eye-brows were swiftly exterminated by the infuriated Didda."[10]

Didda was harsh and cruel to her enemies but kind and generous, in equal measure, to her loyal supporters. While she

10. Ibid., VI, 255-258a.

exterminated the rebels and their families, she munificently rewarded those who stood unswervingly by her side. She fully appreciated the services of Narvahana during the period of political upheavals. She recognised that if his assistance and devotion were not available to the royal house, quelling of the disturbances would have been difficult. The ship of state was steered clear of all shoals in the stormy weather by the queen-mother through the timely advice of this devoted minister. So when the conditions regained normalcy and the administration was re-stabilised, Didda conferred the highest title of Rajanaka (modern Razdan) on Narvahana and raised him to the position of the Prime Minister. Rakka, another faithful soldier, was made the Commander-in-Chief. Similarly other tried men were suitably rewarded and appointed to key posts in civil administration and defence forces of the State.

But despite her best endeavours to root out corruption, punish evil-doers and suppress mischief, Didda failed to stem the rot from spreading. What was worse, self-seekers and vicious characters occasionally influenced her to the detriment of public interest. Among the new officials was one Sindhu, son of palanquin-bearer Kuyya, who had gradually risen to prominence by dint of hard labour. He was working in the Treasury Department and, by levying fresh imposts, had contrived to bring large sums into the government coffers. Didda created a special post of *Ganja* and appointed Sindhu to it. Having earned the confidence of the queen-mother, this miscreant started the sordid game of back-biting which has proved the bane of Kashmir politics through medieval times and indeed up to the present day. Sindhu told the queen-mother that Narvahana had appropriated all power to himself and, by degrees, made her apprehensive. Starting with this imputation and gaining the receptive ear of Didda the base treasurer ultimately achieved success in creating enmity between the two whose friendship was indispensable for the welfare of the country. Things came to such a pass that the queen-mother refused to see Narvahana under one pretext or other. Feeling exasperated, the noble patriot-premier saw the good of his homeland in renouncing life by committing suicide. In the death of Narvahana Kashmir sustained an irreparable loss and, as we shall see, the country which was in sore need of tranquillity and stability, again plunged into turmoil.

With the disappearance of the moderating influence of the

prudent Narvahana, the revengeful Didda was led to indulge in excesses and provoke hostility of powerful feudal lords. She fell out with the sons of Sangrama, the Damara chief. But soon realising her mistake she tried to mollify them ; the touchy Damara was however beyond the pale of appeasement. A damara confederacy was formed which conspired for her downfall. As ill luck would have it, Rakka, the able Commander-in-Chief of the royal forces, suddenly died and left Didda in an unenviable position. Fully conscious of the difficulties she recalled Phalguna, the former premier, who was known as the valiant conqueror of Rajapuri *(Rajauri)* and other territories. The old man was anxiously waiting for this moment and unhesitatingly presented himself at the royal palace. Although the damara mischief was nipped in time yet Phalguna could not restore order as he had lost his old lustre and glory. He could neither check the queen-mother as Narvahana had done nor control the deteriorating political situation. His own secretary Jaya Gupta shared the plunder by officials under the very nose of the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, King Abhimanyu was coming of age. He had grown into a full-blooded, handsome person with lotus-like eyes. He had studied the four *Vedas* and other scriptures and was asparkle with erudition and youth ; he was held in honour by learned men and the sons of savants. By temperament Abhimanyu was in contrast to his mother ; he was peace-loving, studious and kind-hearted. It was at this time that he should have assumed the full powers of ruling the land ; but Didda considering him to be too gentle to govern and to face the trials and tribulations of rulership, tarried to invest him with the grave responsibility. Besides, she was energetic, ambitious and power-hungry ; she was reluctant to hand over the reigns of government to Abhimanyu. Whether due to the agony caused by deprivation of his rights or as a result of delicate health, Abhimanyu fell victim to consumption which after confining him to bed for months finally claimed his life in the year 972 A.D.

Abhimanyu was Didda's only child. His death at such a young age deeply shocked her and temporarily changed her outlook on life. The incident also chastened her ferocious nature and attracted her to religious and charitable deeds. A period of creative activity followed when Didda was occupied in founding towns, constructing edifices and building shrines.

By now Didda had established her reputation as an efficient administrator, a competent military commander, a shrewd

diplomat and an indefatigable worker, but still she hesitated to assume the diadem. Placing Abhimanyu's infant son Nandigupta on the throne she devoted her undivided attention to the works of public utility. First of all, in memory of her son, she built the shrine of Abhimanyu Swamin and the town of Abhimanyupura. In her own name she founded Diddapura where she built the magnificent temple of Didda Swamin and also a specious convent specially meant for the use of people from Madhya Desha (the middle of India round Kanauj), Lata (the country between Narbada and Tapti) and Saurashtra (Gujrat). She built another temple of the same name (Didda Swamin) but of white stone. Her husband who had earned the sobriquet of "Rainer of Armlets" for having lavishly given golden ornaments to his mistresses and concubines, was preserved in memory by her in founding the town of Kankanpura (Kankan meaning armlet). For Buddhist monks who visited Kashmir in large numbers, she built a vihara with high quardrangles. To commemorate the glory of her father, Simharaja, she founded a shrine and a convent for the Brahmans of the plains and called it Simha Swamin. At the confluence of the rivers Vitasta and Sindhu (Modern Shadipur) she built chapels dedicated to Vishnu. "It is needless to enumerate her manifold good works," observes Kalhana, "she consecrated sixty-four foundations such is the report."[11] Besides the original works some of which at least were really magnificent and grand, Didda repaired and renovated nearly all the temples and shrines which had been damaged by fire or were in dilapidated condition due to other causes. In emulation of the queen-mother, nobles and other wealthy people, too, spent huge sums in raising structures of public utility and such became the rage for building edifices that even Volga a female attendant of Didda who assisted the lame queen during games and promenades, built a convent in her own name.

However, the spurt of religious fervour which was in great evidence after the passing away of Abhimanyu could not extinguish the unquenchable ambition in the heart of Didda ; her lust for power was irrepressible. It is said she secretly put to death Nandigupta after a short reign of nearly a year in 973 A.D. Another of her grandsons, Tribhavana, also met the same fate after he had been nominally on the throne for two years (973-975 A.D.) "Thus on the road to death called the throne

11. Ibid. VI., 306 s.

was wantonly placed by the cruel woman her last grandson named Bhimgupta," angrily comments Kalhana.[12]

Didda was unorthodox and unconventional in certain respects which provoked hostility in her own days and has also excited the ire of almost every historian who has harshly criticised her deeds and behaviour. During the reign of Nandigupta a family of warrior Khasha tribe migrated from Poonch and entered Kashmir in search of employment. It comprised five sturdy youths, all brothers, namely, Tunga, Sugandhisha, Prakata, Naga and Attayika. Tunga who came as a grazier of buffaloes was handsome, well-built and intelligent. He soon secured a job as carrier of despatches and, in that capacity, had the opportunity of approaching all the dignitaries of the State. On one occasion he was standing by the side of the War Minister when Didda's eyes fell on his pleasing appearance. Her heart throbbed and she was fascinated. The queen-mother soon arranged to meet Tunga in her private apartment. Some of the ministers were scandalized by such undignified behaviour of Didda which was outrageous in the eyes of orthodoxy. But unmindful of calumny and undaunted by opposition she carried on her amorous affair. Tunga was not only favoured by the queen-mother as her pet, he was gradually promoted to positions of influence and finally appointed Prime Minister of the State. His brothers too secured important posts in the administration. To make a man of low-birth like grazier Tunga as the object of her affection was detestable enough, but when Didda elevated him to the exalted position of the Premier she incurred the furious wrath of many. But, as ever, she was self-willed, strong-minded and determined. It was dangerous to cross her. Those who disliked her association with Tunga and expressed their disapproval were made to pay heavily ; one Bhuya was subjected to inhuman torture and murdered with poison. King Nandigupta who had begun to develop the powers of understanding made feeble attempts to oppose his grand mother. Suspecting that he was doing so under influence of her enemies, Didda imprisoned him. In captivity the prince became a greater source of trouble and a thorn in her side. So, it is said, Didda contrived to get him murdered in 980-81 A.D., and then with that firm and indomitable resolve of which she was always capable she proclaimed herself the sovereign queen of the realm.

12. Ibid., VI, 313s.

No male heir to the throne was now left in whom would centre the treasonable activities of Didda's enemies. The disgruntled elements, therefore, hit on the idea to unite their forces and organise an insurrection. They invited to Kashmir Vigraharaja, Didda's nephew, a young man of great valour who was the ruling chieftain in a neighbouring principality. The plan for an uprising was cleverly thought out. With a view to cause disintegration and disaffection, the shrewd Vigraharaja, on arrival, induced the Brahmans of the principal shrines to enter upon a hunger strike. This caused great excitement and the whole population was in tumult. But no one dared to harm the queen or even insult her. Tunga alone was the target of attack. His life was in danger as a search was made everywhere to capture and kill him and he had to seek refuge in an apartment of the queen. Finally, however, the insurrection failed. It was difficult for the insurgents to match Didda in her wiles. Through her cunning moves and crafty ways she was again able to win over the leading Brahmans whereupon the hunger-strike terminated and Vigraharaja, with his power broken, had to retreat as swiftly as he came.

Having restored peace and consolidated her position afresh, Didda looked formidable and became a nightmare to her foes. In dealing with them she acted ruthlessly. One by one she got the insurgent leaders banished, drowned or murdered. Vigraharaja made one or two further attempts to invade Kashmir but failing to enlist support of the Kashmiris he had to return disappointed and abandon his plan to conquer the valley. In these battles Tunga fought bravely and achieved eminence through his leadership of the armed forces. He was also successful in firmly putting down the gangs which were notorious for disturbing the peace in different parts of the country.

Free from the anxiety of internal commotion, Didda's attention was diverted towards Rajapuri (Rajauri). At the death of Phalguna, the new tributary chief of the principality had displayed signs of insubordination and disloyalty. An army dispatched to subdue him had met with disaster ; it was nearly annihilated in a gorge by Prithvipala, the chief, who commanded his troops in person. Two of the Kashmiri ministers, Sipataka and Hamsraja, also perished at that place. Didda commanded Tunga to proceed with a bigger force and retrieve the position. This army went by a different route and was able to enter unopposed the town of Rajapuri. Prithvipala was surrounded and

defeated ; the troops of the surviving commanders of Kashmir were rescued from the defile. The ruler of Rajapuri sued for peace and accepted the terms that were dictated to him. The victory enhanced the prestige of Tunga and even those sections which were inimical to him began to admire his qualities. Didda honoured him by making him the Commander-in-Chief of the Army in addition to his being the Prime Minister.

Didda had grown pretty old. Whether as the consort of Kshemagupta, guardian of Abhimanyu or regent of her three grandsons, she had functioned as the virtual ruler of Kashmir for more than half a century (950-1001 A.D.). It was her misfortune to cause and witness the end of her progeny. Quite naturally she felt worried about the future of her homeland. She was concerned to instal a capable prince on the throne before she was removed by the inexorable hand of death from the scene of her earthly existence.

Didda's brother Udayaraja had several sons. After pondering over the problem with which she was confronted and profiting by the consultations with her ministers she decided to select one out of them for the throne. She summoned all of them to her palace with a view to test their abilities for the rulership of the kingdom. The boys were of tender age, and it was with some amount of reflection that she devised the test. It is amusing to note what she did. The queen let fall in front of the princes a lot of apples and asked each one of them to secure as many fruits as he could. There was a scramble among the princes and they fought with each other dealing blows and causing injury. Only Samgramaraja escaped unscathed and also managed to secure a good number of apples. Answering Didda's question as to how he contrived to do so, Samgramaraja replied : "By making others engrossed in the struggle with one another while remaining apart I secured the fruits and at the same time was not hurt. In the case of those who involve others into misfortune and stand by vigilant, free from difficulties, what succuess for their selfish ends does not fall to them ?"[13] Considering this to be a sign of prudence and statesmanship Queen Didda solemnly declared the name of Samgramaraja as her successor to the coveted throne of Kashmir. As subsequent history proved the choice was not ill-made. For Samgramaraja ruled the land for twenty-five years (1003-1028 A.D.) which was comparatively a long period in view of the short rules of

13. Ibid. VI., 360, 361 s.

those times. It was during his days that Mahmud Ghazni invaded Kashmir but was repulsed and had to withdraw having failed to reduce a strongly garrisoned outpost on the border.

The powerful and crafty queen breathed her last in the month of September 1003 A.D.

Queen Didda ranks among the remarkable personalities in the medieval period not only of Kashmir State but also of the Indian sub-continent. She undoubtedly stands head and shoulder above other rulers of the valley after Avantivarman till the Hindu rule came to a close. That she was a capable organiser, a clever diplomat, a determined administrator and a bold fighter, no fair minded critic can deny. But she has been denounced as cruel, ruthless and unscrupulous ruler and, a profligate, voluptuous and dissolute woman. Perhaps Kalhana was the first historian to paint her in black colours, and others who followed him have done the same without caring to investigate the matter.

While making an impartial appraisal of Didda's character as a queen, an administrator or a human being, it is fair to keep in mind that she lived through a very difficult period of Kashmir history when Hindu polity in the State had, for more than a century, manifested signs of decline. Gone was that grandeur, vitality and lustre which had distinguished Kashmir monarchs for hundreds of years ; the stability, progress and prosperity which produced kings like great Meghvahana, renowned Lalitaditya or noble Avantivarman had vanished. For decades worthless men, idiots and scoundrels sat on the throne who were totally unfit to rule and had completely abandoned themselves to vulgar and inhuman pursuits. Base intrigues, cold-blooded assassinations and down-right treacheries were the order of the day. We have already stated how Didda's husband Kshemagupta behaved towards scholars and savants ; and he was no worse than those who had preceded him. Sixteen kings had assumed power after Shankaravarman but they mostly ruled for very short periods ranging between one and two years. Partha and Samgramadeva could not remain on the throne for more than three and six months respectively. The wickedest of the Kashmir monarchs, Unmattavanti, who ripped open the bellies of pregnant women to enjoy fun belongs to this gloomy period. It is a tribute to the competence and ability of Didda that in the political confusion, moral decay and social degeneration and despite the handicaps attending on a woman coupled with her

physical deformity, she could be at the helm of affairs for more than half a century of which she ruled the country for nearly twenty years in her own right. If nothing else, this alone entitles her to our respect and admiration.

Undoubtedly, Didda was well-versed in the arts of peace and war. She was a brave warrior and could organise armies and despatch them to fight her battles under command of men chosen by herself. In days of crisis when the realm was threatened with distintegration she assumed the leadership of the fighting forces. Appearing on the battlefield in person she directed the military operations and did not rest till victory was hers. Often, she had to suppress subversive movements and on more than one occasion she had to quell rebellions of powerful elements. She was equally adept in the art of diplomacy and frequently utilised the machiavellian methods of divide and rule to the great advantage of the state.

At the termination of the hostilities, she appropriately punished insurgents, rebels, intriguers and other enemies of the state; but in dealing with the vanquished foes she was never excessively or unnecessarily harsh. Unlike the Kashmir rulers of that age, she never soiled her hands by wantonly or without any justification murdering people or politicians just for fun or out of malice. Even Kalhana who, while expressing his hatred for her, makes the sweeping observation that "women even though born in high families become the enjoyment of the vulgar" has to acknowledge that Didda was brave, pious and capable.

Didda's first crime in the eyes of certain critics, including Kalhana, is that she declined to cremate herself as sati. This was looked upon as the height of faithlessness to the departed husband in ancient and medieval ages. To the custodians of sacred tradition, however barbarous, this was intolerable. And when Didda having first declared to burn herself subsequently changed her mind in front of the funeral pyre at the intercession of Minister Narvahana, the great historian, probably reflecting the contemporary public opinion, could not forgive her. But we, in the twentieth century, see no ground to denounce her on this account.

The second reason for Didda's condemnation was her intimacy, admiration and affection for Tunga, the Khasha youth. It is insinuated that she had fallen in love with him and accepted him as a paramour. This charge does not bear scrutiny.

The queen must have been fairly advanced in age passing through the half-way house of her life when she first met the sturdy, handsome young man. There is ample evidence to support the view that Didda was not only fascinated by the fair looks and bodily beauty of Tunga but was also impressed with his robust common-sense. As has been testified by Kalhana himself Tunga's record of achievements in civil administration no less than in military exploits was praiseworthy. Nor was he maintained at the high position through the patronage of the queen. After the death of his benefactress, Tunga continued to discharge the onerous responsibilities of the exalted office for many years under the succeeding regime which is a clear proof that he must have been a capable man.

The most damaging charge against Didda is that she cruelly put to death, one after another, her three grand-sons solely to satiate her lust for power. The matter needs dispassionate enquiry and research. Perhaps the truth will never be known. Kalhana from whose monumental work the main material about the queen's life and time is derived, has described these murders so briefly that everything is shrouded in mystery and a pall of doubt is cast on the veracity of the reports about the gruesome acts. The historian did not care to tell us how and in what respect these infant kings thwarted Didda's ambitions or obstructed the materialisation of her desires. But it may be surmised that rebel elements who were never wholly eliminated, were conspiring for her downfall and were making attempts to use these unfortunate princes to further their nefarious designs. So Didda was forced, however against her will, to put an end to their lives.

Kashmir was, in the beginning of the tenth century, passing through a period of grave disorder. Had Didda been less ruthless and firm than she actually was there can be no doubt that even the little stability that she had brought about in the deteriorating conditions of the times would have been impossible of achievement. It may be that the deaths occurred in their natural course and that their authorship was ascribed to Didda by her enemies and detractors who were numerous and hated her not merely for political reasons but also for her nonconformist views. Nowhere is it stated that there was any public resentment, hostile demonstration or popular upheaval as a reaction to such atrocious deeds on the part of the queen. Not only one but three ghastly murders of young princes, her own flesh and blood, were attributed to Didda. Is it not surprising

that not even a stir is noticed in the kingdom as a consequence during those disturbed and troublous times when a small indiscretion, an error or a thoughtless act on the part of the ruler shook the throne and threw the state into convulsions? How was it that after butchering the three innocent princes the lame queen could hold the reins of government in her hands for no less than twenty-three years? We are thus driven to the unchallengable conclusion that either the princes died through natural causes or Didda got them murdered under compulsion of circumstances and exigencies of the times to defend the state.

If it is granted that the public opinion in general supported Didda in these assassinations or remained indifferent to them, the people must have apprehended some real danger in the continued existence of the unfortunate princes and therefore connived at the murders. But probably the truth is that Didda has been falsely blamed for the imaginary evil deeds. She was ambitious and occasionally unscrupulous and ruthless, but essentially she was not wicked; in fact she was bold and generous. A woman of her resolute nature and attainments would have distinguished herself in any age, more so in better times than those in which she lived. Not for nothing her people loved and admired her and desired to see her on the throne. A living proof of her popularity is that to this day the Kashmiris of all classes and communities use the epithet "Didda" (in modern idiom Ded) for mother or any lady for whom they cherish highest regard and respect. This appellation is added to the honoured names of all saintly women, dead or living, in the valley.

(d) Kotadevi The Heroic

The last and the noblest of the Hindu queens was Kotadevi. As a matter of fact she was the last Hindu ruler of the valley after whom Kashmir passed into the hands of the Muslims and remained under their sway for nearly five hundred years.

It is a pity that the story of this eminent heroine should not be fully known in all its details. No historian has ever attempted to unearth the many incidents connected with the vicissitudes of her hectic life. The brief narrative of her valiant deeds and diplomatic manoeuvres recorded by the learned chronicler, Jonaraja, should suffice to excite intense curiosity in the minds of all thoughtful Kashmiris and provoke students of history to make further study and research in her life.

The putrefaction that had set in after the death of Avantivarman which Didda and one or two other rulers tried to check, rapidly spread to the farthest corners of the land enveloping all spheres of political, social and moral life of the people. Weakened by continuous misrule and torn by chronic internal dissensions, Kashmir lay prostrate at the beginning of the fourteenth century. When King Sahadeva ascended the throne in 1300 A.D., the valley had been ruled for nearly three centuries by drunkards, gamblers, dissolate princes or their profligate queens. Sahadeva was generous and free of many vices that ruined the Kashmir rulers of that age, but he was cowardly, slothful, careless and imprudent. The declining Hindu rule touched the bottom during his days; it staggered on its last legs and was about to fall; the final crash took place in 1319 A.D.

Before the fateful event three men entered Kashmir who were destined to play important roles in the future history of the country. One of them was Shah Mir, a Muslim adventurer from some village near Reasi or, as some say, from the Swat Valley. He was in search of employment and on arriving at Srinagar in 1312 A.D., he petitioned to King Sahadeva for a job. Muslims were not unknown in Kashmir at the time. Some previous rulers had recruited hundreds of them in their armed forces. There were one or two Muslim centurions in the army of Harshadeva who had a special liking for the members of the community. Sahadeva granted Shah Mir's prayer and commanded his recruitment in the palace service as a subordinate official. The munificent king also granted him a small estate. The second man to immigrate was Rinchana, a Buddhist prince from Leh. His father, the ruler of Ladakh, had been murdered by a rebel faction of his own courtiers and the son accompanied by his devoted adherents came down into the valley to seek asylum in or about 1318 A.D. According to Jonaraj, before Rinchana could present himself to King Sahadeva the country was shaken to its foundations by an outside invasion. Taking advantage of the disorder that ensued Rinchana, assisted by his small but faithful band, attacked the valley and secured it. But some other writers give a different version of the incident. They say that Rinchana was favoured by the king and obtained a fief as befitted his princely status. The third person to arrive at the capital was Lankar Chak another Buddhist of royal birth from the principality of Dardistan in the north whose enemies were at his heels to annihilate him. We are not

interested in the last named in this narrative because he is not connected in any way with our heroine Kota.

Probably for the first time in its history Kashmir was invaded by foreign armies in 1319 A.D. For thousands of years powerful monarchs had protected the country. Even when a weakling sat on the throne or rival princes quarrelled with each other for the capture of the kingdom high mountains stood guard as mighty defenders of the beautiful valley; the Kashmiris never knew what misery it was to be plundered and trodden over by outside hordes. Suddenly, in the year 1319 A.D., a Tartar adventurer, Zulqadar Khan also known as Dulcha or Zulchu, appeared at the head of a vast army of sixty thousand ferocious cavalry men to swoop down upon the fairy land. The dreadful host passed from one end of the valley to the other carrying death and devastation wherever it went. The enemy burned villages, looted towns, demolished edifices, massacred people who showed signs of resistance, and took all able-bodied men prisoners.

Those Kashmiris who escaped the eye of Dulcha's soldiers took to hiding. King Sahadeva was terrified at the reports of the depradations and without even a show of opposition fled to an unknown place. The Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief, Ramchandra, took refuge in the strong and massive fort at Gagangir in the Lar Pargana at the foot of the Zogila. Having depopulated the valley and reduced it to shambles during his long stay, Dulcha faced grave difficulties in meeting the needs of his big army. With the approach of winter the bitter chill aggravated the situation and he decided to leave the country. He was in a hurry and wanted to run away through the shortest route. There was no one with the knowledge of the terrain but his captives whom he could consult. Those humiliated and brutally treated Kashmiris, getting a chance to avenge national honour, advised him to take the most difficult and dangerous of the passes in the south of the valley. While attempting to cross the mountains the entire Tartar army together with their commander perished under a heavy snow storm; the wretched patriotic prisoners also shared the fate of their captors because Dulcha dragged them along with the intention of selling them into slavery outside Kashmir. Hearing of the deserved end of the barbarians the surviving Kashmiris ventured to emerge from their places of hiding. "Then the son found not his father, nor the father his son, nor did brothers meet their brother," laments Jonaraja. "Kashmir

became almost a region after creation, a vast field with few men, without food and full of grass".[14]

Sahadeva's cowardly behaviour in face of the national calamity made him very unpopular with the people. "This Rakshasa of a King under the pretence of protecting the country devoured it for nineteen years three months and twenty-five days", says the historian in a condemnatory tone.[15] The king did not return from his place of shelter to resume the rulership of the state and nothing is known further about his end. He disappears from the pages of history with Dulcha's invasion. The people were, therefore, faced with an important problem of choosing a new sovereign.

Among the prospective candidates was Ram Chandra; the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief. But he had two serious rivals, Shah Mir and Rinchana, both of whom had some hold on the Kashmiris. The former had already been in the valley for six years and, because of his employment in the palace as a notable functionary, he had come in close contact with influential nobles and powerful commanders of the army. He was well known in the political circles and had earned esteem through his devotion to duty and love for his adopted land. Shah Mir was a shrewd politician and a calculating statesman; he was adept in the art of intrigue and a master of strategem. A keen observer of events and character of men, Shah Mir knew all ins and outs of the administration and the failings of the ruling dynasty. He could accurately ascertain the possibilities and opportunities that lay before him in the chaotic conditions prevailing in the country. He was advanced in years, widely experienced and sober in habits. But despite several favourable circumstances, Shah Mir thought that his time had not yet come.

On the other hand, Rinchana, prince by birth, commanding a small but dependable force of loyal Bhuttas (Laddakhis) was tempted to try his luck. He had arrived in the valley at the opportune moment when the land was desolate, people terror-stricken, the king missing and the ruling classes demoralised. Not much fighting was needed and very little risk involved to capture the throne. But the Prime Minister was ambitious

14. Jogesh Chander Dutt, *Kings of Kashmira, being the translation of the Sanskrita works of Jonaraja, Shrivara and of Prajyabhatta and Shuka,* (Published by the author, 1898), Vol. III, P. 17.

15. Ibid, Vol III, P. 19.

Rinchana's serious opponent. "Rinchana intended to pounce upon the city like a royal hawk on a piece of meat, but Ram Chandra the Moon of his dynasty, opposed him at every step", states Jonaraja.[16] The clever Bhutta prince, however, manoeuvred to despatch a number of his followers in the guise of traders to the Gagangir Fort where Ramchandra and his adherents were lodged. Then on a fixed day and at an appointed hour, Rinchana attacked the citadel from outside when his men created confusion inside to the consternation and ruin of the Prime Minister. The gates of the fortress were thrown open by the treacherous Bhuttas : a melee ensued and in a scuffle Ramchandra was slain. Among the captured members of the Prime Minister's family was the valiant Kotadevi.

Some mystery surrounds the lineage of our charming heroine. We are not sure about the relation she had with Ramchandra. Was she the queen of Sahadeva and had taken shelter in the fort at the time of Dulcha's invasion when her royal consort ran away stealthily, was she the wife of Ramchandra or was she the Prime Minister's daughter ? Jonaraja's description of her on this point is obscure and confusing. Of this, however, we can be certain, she was young in years, alert, patriotic and brave. Unlike the common run of the queens of those times she was free from many debasing vices and indeed had subdued her passions to serve her ideal.

As a staunch realist that she remained throughout her life young Kota, on falling into the hands of the Bhuttas, instantaneously realized that Rinchana was the man of destiny and that she could be of help to her countrymen and restore peace in her homeland only by co-operating with the conqueror. She, therefore, made peace with the usurper and accepted him as her husband when Rinchana respectfully made the offer of marriage to her.

From the outset, Kotadevi exerted tremendous influence over her husband the new sovereign of Kashmir. Rinchana had freshly arrived and was alien to every man and thing in a land where fate made him the sole master. His entire dependence on Kota was natural and understandable. It was his ardent desire to get himself acclimatised to the surroundings and become one with his subjects. Kota helped him to achieve this laudable end. Very likely it was at her suggestion that the Buddhist Rinchana

16. Ibid, Vol III, P. 18.

expressed his desire to embrace Shaivite faith, the religion of Kashmir Hindus. He approached the leading Brahman priests and implored them to convert him. But, conceited as ever, the orthodox Kashmiri Pandits under the leadership of one Devaswami, turned down the royal petition because "being a Bhutta even though a king Rinchana was unworthy of such initiation".[17] Dismayed and disgusted at such humiliating refusal, the king turned to the high priests of other faiths for light and guidance. How happy he was to readily find a Muslim faqir and preacher, Abdur Rehman, popularly known in Kashmir as Bulbul Shah, come to his aid and satisfy his spiritual yearning! Rinchana was deeply impressed by the perspicacity of the saint and the simple philosophy of Islam as expounded by him. He readily accepted the new faith and assumed the Muslim name of Sadar-ud-Din in accordance with the advice of his preceptor. We are left to guess how painfully agonising must have been the short-sighted, nay suicidal, decision of the Kashmir Brahmans to Kotadevi and how she must have deplored the conversion of Rinchana to Muslim faith. But this was only the first in a series of bitter experiences that the ill-fated queen had to undergo through a career of fierce struggle when she invariably planned in a masterly manner to resuscitate Hindu rule but was almost as frequently defeated by her collaborators; no wonder the final success baulked her.

What transpired between King Sadar-ud-Din and Queen Kota at the time of conversion has not been recorded, but despite the statements of certain biased writers to the contrary, Kota clung to the ancient, indigenous Hindu faith. It is manifest from her subsequent behaviour; the very fact that she is known to history by only her Hindu name should be sufficient evidence of her adherence to the religion of her forebears. But the historians continue to differ. "After King Rinchana's public conversion to Islam", says Dr. Sufi, "she could not in pursuance of the tenets of that creed remain a Hindu, being the wife of a Muslim, because Islam does not countenance marriage or lawful conjugal relations between a Muslim and non-Muslim unless the latter is a *Kitabiya*."[18] This can be easily explained by the fact that, in Kashmir, Islam to be a popular religion had to adapt itself to the demands of local culture. In their religious views the Kashmiris have throughout their long chequered history been liberal and

17. Ibid., Vol. III, P. 21.
18. Op. cit., Vol. I, P. 127.

tolerant. Couples espousing divergent religions were not unknown in the valley but had existed in a large number in the past. Buddhist wives of Hindu husbands or monotheist men with polytheist spouses were no rarities before the advent of Islam. There could be nothing surprising in Rinchana and Kota living like man and wife though belonging to two different creeds. Kota appears not to have yet lost all hope to regain Kashmir for the deposed royalty. At the same time she considered it her foremost duty to fully co-operate with King Sadar-ud-Din in restoring peace and tranquillity and in helping her countrymen to recover from the ravages wrought by Dulcha. Says Jonaraja : "The country was weary of trouble and disorder, and Sri Rinchana Suratrana gave it rest under the shelter of his arm ; when the dark days disappeared, the people of Kashmir witnessed again all the festivities which they had beheld under the former kings."[19]

True to the traditions of Kashmir culture, Kotadevi did not raise any objection to the religious observances and activities of the Sultan nor did she in any way prevent the spread of the new faith. Rinchana built the first mosque in Kashmir as also a *khanqah* for his preceptor Bulbul Shah. The ruins of both can be seen even today at Bulbul Lankar in Srinagar on the right bank of the Vitasta. More than ten thousand Kashmiris accepted Islam during the brief period of three years that Rinchana remained in power.

Kota had one issue from Rinchana, a son named Haider. The Sultan desired to bring him up as a Muslim and educate him in accordance with the Islamic principles. With the approval of the queen the infant was given into the charge of Shah Mir, the old official at the palace.

Within a couple of years King Sadar-ud-Din was able to assuage the pain of the people and instil some confidence in them about their future. But he was not without opposition or free of danger from the side of his enemies. Sahadeva had no doubt disappeared for good but his brother, Udayanadeva, was alive. Like others of his kind he too had taken to his heels at the time of Tartar invasion and fled to Gandhara. Nevertheless, he was infuriated at the usurpation of power by the alien Bhutta. By despatching messengers with exciting notes he instigated certain disgruntled courtiers and military commanders, and tactfully organised a rebellious faction in the capital. A

19. *Kings of Kashmira*, Vol. III, P. 19.

conspiracy was hatched to assassinate the king. One day while passing inadequately guarded on a highway Rinchana was attacked near Vimshaprastha by a group of conspirators called Shukkalankitas under the command of the ring-leader Tukka. Sadar-ud-Din was badly wounded ; he fainted and was believed to be dead. Thereupon, some miscreants ran away but the bolder ones remained at the spot. On regaining consciousness the king fought against the insurgents with his back to the wall and miraculously defeated them. However, the injury on the head which he had received in the skirmish never healed fully and proved fatal. Rinchana died in November 1323 A.D. after he had been on the throne for three years one month and nineteen days.

Now Kotadevi acted in a significant manner. She declined to proclaim Haider as the successor of the deceased king. She was powerful enough to make a decision acceptable to all and nominate the next ruler. With the consultation of her trusted councillors she invited Udyanadeva from Gandhara and installed him on the throne. By doing so she fulfilled her cherished desire of restoring the kingdom to the lawful indigenous rule. It is a pity that Kota did not possess the sagacity or the courage at this stage to wear the diadem which she did when it was too late. At the death of Rinchana she was unquestionably the most influential and popular personality in the realm ; no one dared to oppose her and when she announced her resolve to crown Udyanadeva everyone bowed to it. To buttress the new regime and to strengthen the government, Kota manifested a revolutionary courage rarely known in the declining age of entering into wedlock with the new king. This union was symbolic inasmuch as it signified absence of any factions in the royal house.

Shah Mir could neither have liked the nomination of Udyanadeva nor the dowager queen's marriage. But he was yet weak to oppose her and assert himself. He also realized that Kotadevi had played her hand masterly and catered for the sentiments of the people. As Jonaraja states, Shah Mir did not have the necessary strength to get himself coronated. He was fully aware of the fact that his own supporters were yet very few and that the dowager queen was the beloved of the nobles and the lords. Patient and sober as ever, Shah Mir, making virtue of necessity, submitted to the will of Kota and warmly acknowledged the sovereignty of Udyanadeva.

But Kota's choice was not a happy one. Udyanadeva did not fulfil the expectations and hopes that the patriotic queen had associated with his person. He did not prove worthy of the trust that the courtiers, nobles and grandees had reposed in him. He remained on the throne for more than fifteen years but lacked all the virtues of a wise monarch. He was chicken-hearted and good-for-nothing ; his career proved, if a proof were still wanting, that the Kashmir Hindus had exhausted all potentialities to rule and administer a good government. The whole burden of ruling the country fell on the shoulders of Kota. "She was all powerful," remarks Jonaraja, "she was as it were the mind and the king the body who carried out her orders".[20] The turbulent Lavanya (modern Lone) tribe resorted to the nefarious activities for which they had become notorious but the firm-minded and iron-handed queen kept them under control and maintained peace throughout the land. While Udyanadeva "spent his time in bathing, in penance and in prayers and wasted money on charities and by bestowing all gold in the treasury on mendicants in the temple of Vishnu," the energetic and indefatigable Kota attended to the duties of the state and worked for the welfare of the people.

Perhaps, notwithstanding the indolence and imbecility of Udyanadeva, things would have moved on well and Kota might have succeeded in her plan of stabilising Hindu rule ; but a bolt from the blue struck Kashmir which upset all her schemes to safeguard the independence and future of her motherland. In or about 1330 A.D. there was the second big invasion from outside. Urwan (also called Urdil by some historians and Achala by Jonaraja) a desperado entered the valley from the south with a mass of armed men and threatened to destroy everything falling on his way. Getting the information of the invasion the timid king, thinking that Dulcha had turned up again, bolted away in fear to Ladakh. But the brave queen stood firm and proclaimed her determination to defend the country, protect the people and face the enemy at any cost. She made a stirring appeal to her countrymen to shed fear, to act unitedly in the hour of calamity and to help her drive out the aggressive foreigners. Having secured the willing co-operation of all sections and having mobilized the common peoole, Kota opened negotiations with Achala and by diplomatic moves

20. Ibid., Vol. III, P. 24.

reduced him to such a plight that he was forced to sue for peace. In a few days the threat of attack disappeared and the enemy returned discomfitted through the same pass by which he had entered.

In the dismal days when dark clouds of the invasion hovered over the valley Shah Mir played an admirable role. He was foremost among the defenders of the people and had placed his loyal services at the disposal of the queen. He was prepared to risk his life to push back the invader. In every way he identified himself with the interests of the land which he had by now adopted as his own. Through weal or woe he was one with the Kashmiris and suffered all trials and tribulations with them.

With the disappearance of Achala the brazen-faced Udayanadeva returned from Ladakh and humbly implored Kota for forgiveness. Imprudently enough, the high-souled queen, in a spirit of misplaced generosity, despite his base desertion welcomed him and re-installed him on the throne. Her ardent desire to see a scion of the royal dynasty as the ruler had the better of her. No one could cross her will or dare to oppose her; but not all her courtiers and councillors were convinced of the wisdom of her decision. Shah Mir felt aggrieved and resentful. But so long as Kota enjoyed the popularity he was helpless and had to submit. He, however, sensed that it was now only a matter of time; the chances of his success were becoming brighter. So he started making preparations for the day when he would have his opportunity.

Shah Mir's was a scheming brain. Through the meritorious services which he rendered during the calamitous period of foreign invasions he had reserved a place for himself in the hearts of the Kashmiris. He was a top-ranking courtier and wielded substantial power in the government; his influence in the armed forces was by no means insignificant. In order to further strengthen his position Shah Mir started fortifications at strategic points in the valley. He also contracted matrimonial alliances with the indigenous nobles and feudal lords. He had already established political contacts with Damara chiefs and leaders of warlike tribes in the districts. With the purpose of weakening Kota's hold, Shah Mir endeavoured to spread disaffection against her through his supporters, sympathisers and friends. His chief weapon to belittle and discredit the queen was to dilate on the proved incompetence and utter

worthlessness of the king. Shah Mir frequently stressed that the real heir to the rulership of Kashmir was Haider. It made Udayanadeva miserable.

But Kota was daring, firm and determined to carry through. No opposition would deter her and she considered no risk too great to subdue her opponents. Once the Lord of Kampana, a feudatory of Kashmir, perhaps at the instigation of Shah Mir, disobeyed her orders. To teach the erring feudatory a lesson, Kota went in person at the head of a detachment to chastise him. The venture miscarried and she was trapped and imprisoned. It was only through a clever ruse played by the loyal Minister Kumarabhatta that she was rescued and the Lord of Kampana defeated.

King Udayanadeva died in February 1939 A.D. Kotadevi had one son Bola Rattan by him. The upbringing of the prince was the responsibility of the trusted courtier Bikhshana Bhatta, a rival of Shah Mir. Because of the open secret that Shah Mir had a design to capture power, Kota felt unsafe from his side. So when the throne fell vacant she overruled the claims of both Haider and Bhola Rattan. The installation of the former on the throne would have resulted in virtually handing over the power to Shah Mir and the latter was yet an infant unfit to rule. In these circumstances Kota took the momentous decision of assuming the sovereignty and of ruling the country in her own right. This was a sound step but, alas, it was taken too late. Shah Mir was intelligent enough to comprehend the reasons and grasp the full implications of the move but still lacked courage to cross her. When however Kota appointed Bikhshana Bhatta as the Prime Minister in preference to Shah Mir, the Muslim courtier felt profoundly offended. Casting aside the small surviving sense of loyalty that still prevented him from acting on his long-cherished schemes, he raised the banner of revolt. He was successful in enlisting the support of the turbulent lavanyas by alternately coaxing and threatening them. Then he held the capital the nerve centre of politics, under his command and planned to capture power. Apprehensive at these swift developments Kota left the city and repaired to the fort of Abhiantarkot (modern Andarkot near Sumbal) which was the second largest town in the valley.

Shah Mir realised that it was not easy to dethrone Kota or to defeat her on the battlefield. He therefore conceived a strategem. Following the queen he reached Andarkot and

feigned illness. It was given out that he was on death-bed and undergoing acute physical pain. Shah Mir was quite advanced in age being nearly seventy-six years old. Believing the reports of his serious malady to be true the kind-hearted Kotadevi, as a matter of duty, forthwith commanded, Bikhshana Bhatta and another Minister Avatara to pay a visit to the dying man and make enquiries after his health. No sooner was the Prime Minister conducted into the sick man's chamber than Shah Mir plunged his dagger into Bikhshana Bhatta's heart which caused the innocent old Brahman's instantaneous death. When the report of this dastardly murder was communicated to Kota she became furious and instinctively decided to punish the criminal. She commanded his surrender but was aghast to find that many of her courtiers and officials were in league with the assassin. They dissuaded her from adopting any drastic measures. Jonaraja says: "Queen Kota was determined to besiege Shah Mir and she was capable of doing so, but her evil-minded Ministers deterred her from doing it, and reminded her that Shah Mir and Bhikhshana had brought up her boys, and that it was fate that had killed the one by making the other an instrument. That in order to assuage the grief which had arisen from the death of the Brahman the senseless Shah Mir would sacrifice the lives of others in blazing fire of his anger".[21] Surrounded by corrupt advisers and unreliable councillors and having lost her trusted Prime Minister, Kota had no alternative but to accept the humiliating advice. In this way an obscure fortune hunter Shah Mir who had come twenty-seven years earlier in search of a job became the master of the beautiful Valley of Kashmir in 1339 A.D.

Even then Kota did not forsake her hope ot saving the homeland from falling into alien hands. She must really have been an incorrigible optimist. In 1339 A.D. she had long passed the prime of her life and was well-advanced in her middle age. Shah Mir was quite old. Yet when he proposed to marry her she agreed. Probably by doing so she thought of seizing another opportunity to restore the freedom of her motherland and the indigenous rule of the Hindu kings. She was prepared to swallow any bitter pill to see her desire fulfilled. Jonaraja says that for one night Shah Mir and Kota actually shared the same bed. But the noble-souled and the sensitive queen could not re-

21. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 29-30.

concile herself to the degrading position of living like a wife of the foreigner who had come as a humble suppliant at the palace gate and could claim no great ancestory. There appears to have arisen some controversy between Shah Mir and Kota during the night when hot words were exchanged. The usurper got the self-respecting and upright queen arrested in the morning by his police chief Tikhshana. Overpowered by grief, disapointment and dismay the queen committed suicide in July 1339 A.D. She was on the throne for no more than five months.

Kota was an idealist who, unmindful of her personal well-being, strenuously worked for the achievement of her objective. She is a remarkable figure in the history of Kashmir who has played a distinguished role to defend the independence of her homeland. Misfortune dogged her at every step. She had to fight invaders and suppress insurrections. Times were chaotic, economy was shattered and corruption rampant. Yet she calmly faced every trial and by dint of high moral character, sagacity and courage she weathered many a storm. Looking back at the sequence of events which preceded and followed her and bearing a dispassionate mind on the subject it may be observed that Kota was fighting against heavy odds ; she was up against the accumulated rot of several generations ; she was striving to accomplish a colossal task which was beyond the capacity of any individual. But, despite her ultimate failure, the achievements to her credit are numerous. Even in her defeat she shines brightly and will ever rise high in the estimation of fair critics. For nearly a decade she held the reins of the government in her hands ; it was a period of comparative peace and prosperity. Jonaraja who lived and wrote his annals only less than a century after her death says: "As the canal nourishes cultivated fields with water, so did the Queen nourish the people by bestowing much wealth on them. She was to the kingdom what the moon is to the blue lotus ; and to the enemy she was what that luminary is to the white lotus".[22]

22. Ibid., Vol. III, P. 30.

CHAPTER THREE

ILLUSTRIOUS HINDU QUEENS-CONSORT

IF only four queens ruled Kashmir in their own right, the number of those who actively participated in the conduct of state affairs and who shared the trials and tribulations, joys and sorrows and successes and failures of Hindu monarchs is larger. Ancient historians have briefly recorded the doings of a lot of the queens and on the basis of these documents we can easily affirm that very few of them have been passive spectators of the drama that was being enacted on the stage of social and political life before their eyes. Almost every one of the queens has played her part, big or small, in one way or the other ; some by sharing the burdens and responsibilities of administration ; others by abolishing evil customs or reforming the social conditions and yet others by participating in religious and constructtve activities such as building temples, *gosadans*, viharas, convents, mathas, aqueducts, tanks, reservoirs, erecting public edifices, founding towns or giving charities and alms to the needy.

On a study of old annals one is struck with the fact that the Hindu queens had great opportunities of displaying their merits and capabilities for public service. "Kalhana's poem proves," observes R.S. Pandit, the learned translator of *Rajatarangini*, "that the ancient system of the Aryans in India who, like the Ionic and Doric races and the Lacedaemonians, recognised the freedom of women prevailed upto the twelfth century."[1] Some of the queens have splendid achievements to their credit and they have shown that in comprehending intricate problems of governance or in behaving courageously during the periods of recurring

1. River of Kings, P. XXIX.

crises, adversities or misfortunes they were in no way inferior to the kings. There are instances when through foolishness, short-sight or imprudence a monarch was instrumental in inviting troubles for his government and the people, but by the timely advice and bold action of his queen the troubles were averted. On more than one occasion kings have been saved by their consorts from being deposed or even beheaded. But queens have also been the cause of the undoing of some kings. It would be untrue to say that every queen was virtuous or praiseworthy. As we shall presently see on many occasions they have occasioned trouble and become a source of maladministration and misgovernment. The point to be made is that whether for good or for bad they were active in public life and exerted tremendous influence on the society of the times. In certain spheres of social activity they had especially proved their worth and made their mark.

It is rather difficult to accurately fix the part which a queen-consort played in the progress or decline of the regime when she lived. Because despite her prominent position and active participation in state affairs, so long as the king lived every idea or plan whether originating from him or her was attributed to the ruling monarch. Every success or failure was held to his credit. Only when something done by the queen struck so extraordinary and uncommon as to catch the public eye or reach the ear of the chronicler, was it recorded in her name ; otherwise the achievements, good or bad, of the regime were fathered on the king. But this view of history is totally unfair to the queens. With the knowledge that they had important voice in the administration or were consulted by the kings on every occasion when big problems of state were decided, it would not be incorrect to state that the credit for successes and censure for failures must be shared by both. If it is known from authentic historical data that a queen had been actively engaging herself in the affairs of the state it is safe to infer that she had a hand in every momentous decision of the time as the king could adopt no measure to which she had not been a party.

Space forbids us to describe the deeds of all the queens who have been mentioned by historians and the record of whose activities has come down to us. But some of them at any rate deserve notice as their achievements have been by no means insignificant.

(1) Ishandevi

The first of these to attract attention in chronological order is Ishandevi, Queen of Jalauka who is reported to have ruled Kashmir long before the beginning of the Christian Era. Jalauka stands out in Kashmir History for having introduced constitutional reforms to bring the State in line with advanced regions of India and for a continuous good rule spreading over a period of sixty years. Till his days the valley was backward and underdeveloped, politically as well as economically ; the government was absolutely autocratic and trade with the outside world was unknown. Feudal lords owned all cultivable land and the people lived and toiled as their bondmen and serfs. It was Jalauka who made drastic changes in different departments of social life and carried Kashmir on the path of progress and prosperity.

Jalauka was opposed to Buddhism. He upheld the more ancient brahmanic cult with its caste system, idol worship and ritualism. Yet, strangely enough, he was a staunch supporter of political and economic advance. Soon after he came to the throne he curtailed the prerogatives of monarchy and limited its powers by creating the Council of State comprising seven members viz., (1) The Chief Justice, (2) The Superintendent of Revenue, (3) The Treasurer, (4) The Chief of Army, (5) The Envoy, (6) The Pontiff and, (7) The Astrologer. Having transferred the respective portfolios of administration to the seven ministers, Jalauka next took another effective step to revolutionise the government by creating the eighteen different departments which were in vogue at the time in most progressive regions in India. The heads of these departments were nominated as (1) The Councillor, (2) The Pontiff, (3) The Heir-Apparent, (4) Generalissimo, (5) The Chamberlain, (6) Steward of the Royal Household, (7) Superintendent, (8) The Treasurer, (9) Auditor-General, (10) Officer with Joint Executive and Judicial Functions, (11) Prefect of the City, (12) Superintending Engineer of Works, (13) Lord Chief Justice, (14) President of the Assembly, (15) Warden of Criminal Jurisdiction, (16) Warden of Fortifications, (17) Warden of Marches and (18) Conservator of Forests.

For his enlightened views and broad outlook Jalauka was held in great reverence by scholars and savants and was very popular with the people. His liberal ideas and good

actions had earned for him the title of "the leader of men and of the gods."

Much of what Jalauka did in his lifetime was inspired by his talented queen Ishan Devi. We do not know to what extent she assisted the king in making the constitutional and other reforms a success; but there can be no doubt that she influenced him in arriving at his decisions and in implementing his resolves. Great tributes have been paid to her for taking deep interest in art, architecture and religion. She was well versed in the philosophy of Kashmir Brahmans and could easily discourse on religious topics with learned men. When Jalauka turned his attention to building temples and raising other structures for the material and spiritual well-being of the people according to his own lights, the queen vied with him in doing the same. She founded Matri Chakras (Circles of Mothers) at the frontier towns and in different parts of the kingdom. In the temples built by her were installed the Shaivite goddesses, the Sapta Matrikas or Seven Mothers, representing life and death, radiant loveliness and hideous ugliness etc. A sample of such sculpture is still extant and can be seen in the State Museum at Srinagar. It is a lovely statue of Durga as Varahi, an exquisitely sculptured life-size figure of a young woman with the face of Varaha. It is surmised that all the temples of Ishandevi must have enshrined similar handsome statues of Sapta Matrikas.

Some historians believe that the temple on the crest of the Shankaracharya Hill at Srinagar was originally built jointly by Jalauka and Ishan Devi though not in the present form.

(2) Vakpushta

At the close of the second century before Christ there came to the throne of Kashmir Tunjina a monarch of humanist views and charitable disposition. He had the good fortune to be married to a virtuous lady, Vakpushta. They were deeply in love with each other and their sole and dominating desire was to see their subjects happy and prosperous. In private as well as in public the king and the queen acted in such a close co-operation that the people believed them to be one. For that reason historians have mentioned their works as having been jointly done by them both and not either by the king or by his consort. "The blessed couple founded the shrine of Shiva as well as the town of Kalika"; in this way has Kalhana described

their achievements in *Rajatarangini*[2]. At the time of coronation Vakpushta was crowned almost exactly in the same manner as Tunjina. She was throughout her life called the Crowned Queen of the State.

For many years the blessed couple lived in happiness working incessantly for the betterment of the people and the glorification of their homeland. But suddenly the era of peace and progress was interrupted by an unforeseen calamity. Kashmir has been a land of floods and famines. It was one of the most dreadful of draughts which the Kashmiris witnessed in the reign of Tunjina. As if to test the intelligence and fortitude of the royal couple there was an untimely snowfall in the valley during the month of Bhadoon (August—September) which totally destroyed the paddy crop. Rice is the staple food of the Kashmiris. With the destruction of the entire produce of the land famine made its frightful appearance. Hunger stalked from one end of the valley to the other exacting heavy toll of life. People began to die like flies. Those who survived got nothing to eat and when soon winter arrived the famished people had to undergo further privations caused by intense cold. It was a difficult period full of miseries and trials. The wretched Kashmiris forgot all about modesty, pride, culture and love. "The father abandoned his emaciated son begging for food when his life was at his throat, and the son his father ; everyone sought nourishment for himself", states Kalhana. "Hungry people fought with each other like goblins longing for food. Coarse in speech, weak with starvation, weird, frightful in appearance, furtively looking in all directions each individual endeavoured at the cost of all living beings in the world to provide nourishment for his own self."[3]

To face the misfortune boldly and maintain the morale of the people, Tunjina, accompained by Vakpushta, toured all the parts of his dominions and generously distributed food to the starving and alms to the destitute wherever he found them. He opened the coffers of the State as well as his own private treasuries, and liberally spent money to purchase foodstuffs for wide distribution among the needy and the deserving. When his own wealth was exhausted he prevailed upon ministers, feudal lords, traders and other rich men to loosen their purse-strings in the cause of the sufferers. But the conditions

2. *Rajatarangini*, II, 14s.
3. Ibid., II, 23-25s.

continued to deteriorate and the king's efforts were inadequate to protect the people from being swallowed by the appalling famine. Overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness, Tunjina, in moments of dejection and dismay, contemplated to end his own mental agony by committing suicide. Having made the grim decision, he revealed his mind to Vakpushta saying that he could not endure to witness the unprecedented sufferings of the people. He told the queen that it was not possible for him to see learned, refined and cultured men forsaking their motherland and poorer folk dying daily by the thousand. His intense thinking had driven him to the one conclusion that it was the outcome of his own sins that such a grave calamity had befallen the beautiful and sacred land. "Therefore having exhausted my means I shall now sacrifice my body in the blazing fire for I am not able to see such a destruction of the subjects", declared Tunjina.[4] Having spoken in this strain, overcome with compassion the king covering his face with a garment threw himself on the coach and wept in silence.[5]

Vakpushta had been no less worried and perplexed. But she was made of a sterner stuff. Through long days and longer nights she had toiled, assisted the king and endeavoured to mitigate the common distress. She was conscious that their efforts had proved unavailing and the dead bodies of the starved people were rising in heaps everywhere. But she was determined to fight till the last and never to surrender. Giving a patient ear to the pathetic woes of the agonised soul she administered a mild rebuke to Tunjina for his cowardly behaviour which befitted an irresolute man and not a powerful monarch. "If the ability to cut through insurmountable difficulties is absent in a king what then in the great is the mark of their greatness?" she asked.[6] She reminded Tunjina of the universally accepted truth that in a righteous cause there can be no defeat and that a moral man is sure to secure support somehow or other in his struggle against misfortunes, however numerous and formidable.

The bold words of the queen heartened Tunjina and he felt ashamed at his unbecoming decision. Then with singular firmness of mind he devoted himself to the task of relief. But

4. Ibid., II. 41s.
5. Ibid., II. 42s.
6. Ibid., II. 46s.

there was not much to be done materially in this direction for there was little to distribute. Therefore, the God-fearing couple started saying heart-felt prayers in the hope of purifying their souls. They would forego sleep and rest and, keeping vigil, wept tears of repentence and asked for forgiveness through out day and night.

The rest of the story is rather obscure. It is said that one morning the valley was flooded with dead fowls which make delicious dishes in the menu of the Kashmiri homes. Kalhana says that heaps of the freshly killed wild pigeons were found on the roofs of houses to the agreeable surprise of the famished millions.[7] Evidently this is the great historian's poetic way of saying that foodstuffs arrived in abundance from friendly quarters and continued to come for several months till the next bumper crop was ripe in the fields and the country could rely-on its own stocks for feeding the people.

Vakpushta's amazing power of endurance and dignified calm in face of the calamity saved Kashmir from annihilation and the king from committing suicide. But she was great in other respects too. She was a philanthropist, a social reformer and a builder.

The virtuous queen founded two towns Katimusha and Ramusha (modern Kaimuh and Ramuh). She also built a large alms-house where destitute men and women, irrespective of caste, coming from different regions and lands were freely fed. Kalhana says that the alms-house was in existance till his own day (1150 A.D.).[8]

(3) Ananglekha

Baladitya was the last king of the ruling danasty which was founded by Praversena II and held power for more than five centuries. He led several military expeditions to foreign lands and conquered many territories adjoining his own dominions. There is a report that he had even brought some regions on the eastern sea coast under his sway where he raised victory columns to commemorate his successful exploits. In Kalambi, after he had defeated the local Vankala chief, he built a magnificent rest house for the comfort of the Kashmiris who travelled that way as traders or sight-seers and temporarily resided in the town.

7. Ibid., II. 50-51s.
8. Ibid., II, 58s.

Baladitya had one son who died prematurely during the lifetime of his father. The king felt profoundly shocked particularly so because there was no other male heir to inherit the vast kingdom. While the son was alive astrologers and soothsayers had forboded the end of the dynasty with Baladitya ; the sorrowing king had been told that the throne would pass on to his son-in-law after his death. These ominous predictions had distracted Baladitya and when unhappily the evil prophecy about his son's death somehow turned true he acted rashly and senselessly with the object of disproving the calculations of the astrologers.

In those remote times people generally believed that only the offspring of royal dynasties were destined to sit on the throne and men of the so-called low birth could not occupy that exalted position. Baladitya had an attractive and charming daughter, Ananglekha, whose accomplishments were widely recognised. She was popular with the courtiers no less than with the common people. In distraction and acute distress the king hit upon a fantastic plan which was as stupid in conception as it could be ruinous in execution. He decided to give the princess in marriage to Durlabvardhan, an official incharge of horse-fodder. Despite the protestations of Ananglekha and the disapproval of wise coucillors and ministers, Baladitya stuck to his resolve and commanded celebration of nuptials without delay.

Not unjustifiably the innocent princess was profoundly offended by the insensate deed of her father. She was much upset and, brooding over her gloomy future, thought of avenging herself by indulgence in fun and frolic. She declined to have anything to do with Durlabhvardhan and formed illegitimate intimacy with some persons who had access to the palace and held high positions at the court. Gradually the princess lost all sense of shame and was involved in many an affair. Among those who enticed away the youthful maiden was Minister Khankha. He started flirtations with Ananglekha within the premises of the palace. Poor Durlabhvardhan came to know of it and once in a midnight search he found the voluptuous princess fast asleep in the amorous embrace of her paramour. He could have murdered them both ; the provocation was strong and the guilt heinous. No one could have accused Durlabhvardhan of any excess, and indeed his action would have been praised on all

hands. But calming down his anger and controlling his powerful impulses with some superhuman effort, Durlabhvardhan thought of awakening the souls of the erring lovers. Quietly he took up his pen and wrote a couplet on the edge of Khankha's scraf which purported to say: "Remember that you have not been slain though you deserved to be killed." The warning produced the desired effect. Khankha, on reading the couplet, hung his head down in shame and was over-whelmed by Durlabhvardhan's nobility, forbearance and broad-mindedness. Ananglekha was no more the object of his affection and pleasure-hunting none of his interests. His only desire was to do something in return that would be commensurate with the kindness of the magnanimous accuser.

Nor did Ananglekha remain unaffected by the philosophical attitude of her husband whose greatness the incident revealed when she pondered over it. Aware of her guilt and the way she had maligned, outraged and maltreated her innocent husband she longed to make honourable amends by becoming a dutiful wife and by living like one who was begotten by a great king. Her transformation was complete. The incident proved a turning point in her life and made her famous in history.

Baladitya died in 519 A.D. after having ruled Kashmir for thirty years and eight months. In view of the ideas and traditions of those times it was certain that powerful ministers and haughty nobles of the State would under no circumstances and in no case have allowed a commoner to ascend the throne especially when he had served in the capacity of a petty official in charge of horse-fodder; nor would the people have easily accepted Durlabhvardhan as their august sovereign. But Khankha was very resourceful and wielded enormous influence in quarters that counted. Ananglekha too, for all her frailties, was still a beloved princess. And when both vigorously supported the claims of Durlabhvardhan he was successful in securing the crown without much opposition from any side.

Durlabhvardhan maintained his reputation of cool-headedness and prudence after he became the king. His long rule of thirty-six years was marked by peace and uninterrupted advance of the people. In making his regime a success the charming Ananglekha contributed a big share. As queen-consort she proved worthy of her father. Kalhana who is reluctant to

forgive women any lapse in the maintenance of high standard of sexual chastity has some good words for her. The historian says that Ananglekha's dignity was matched by her good looks. It was through the joint efforts of the royal couple that the foundations were laid of the Karkota dynasty which gave to Kashmir some of the best rulers including the renowned Lalitaditya Mukhtapida whose empire extended from Central Asia in the North to Western Ghats in the South, to Bay of Bengal in the East and Gujrat in the West.

In the reign of Durlabhvardhan the valley suffered from heavy innundation when dykes and embankments were destroyed and the land presented the spectacle of a vast lake. Thousands of houses fell and lakhs of inmates were either drowned or rendered homeless. It was the king assisted by his devoted spouse who worked night and day for months to rehabilitate the roofless and the bereaved when others were overwhelmed by the catastrophe.

Queen Ananglekha constructed a grand vihara to perpetuate her own memory. She loved to serve the savants and scholars irrespective of the consideration whether they happened to be Buddhists or votaries of the Brahmanical faith.

(4) Srilekha

Mention has already been made of Sangramaraja, the prince whom Didda selected for the throne of Kashmir in her lifetime. Soon after the formidable queen's death the State lost most of the ministers and dignitaries who had assisted her in running the administration. Of the notable few who continued to live was the Khasha Prime Minister Tunga. Had Sangramaraja not the good fortune of having a talented lady Srilekha as his queen, it is doubtful if he could have ruled Kashmir for a quarter century practically without any internal disturbances or invasion from outside.

Like some other ladies of Kashmir, Srilekha enjoyed bodily comforts and companionship of colourful persons attending the court. Whenever she happened to be free from the responsibilities and cares of state she loved to enjoy the blessings of life with ministers and nobles. She has been accused of having two paramours Tribhavana and Jayakara, both courtiers of the king. But in spite of her weaknesses of heart, Samgramaraja passionately loved Srilekha and held her in the highest regard

because she was talented and wise. She was the recipient of innumerable precious gifts at the hands of the king through which she was able to amass enormous wealth. At several centres in the valley she had founded her own *ganjas* (treasures) of which that at Mayagrama was the biggest. With the help of the coffers the liberal Srilekha relieved the destitute of their suffering and distress when they approached her royal camp during extensive tours in the countryside which she undertook.

The most notable event in the reign of Samgramaraja is the attempt of Mahmud Gaznavi to invade Khashmir. The redoubtable sultan had, by his successive invasions, struck terror in the hearts of the ruling princes in North India. He cherished a great desire to plunder the kingdom of Kashmir for he had been told that the valley was most sacred in the eyes of Hindus and inestimable wealth was stored in its temples. Till 1017 A.D., however, the mighty sultan was unable to lead his horses into the mountain fastnesses that separate the charming valley from the rest of the world. But that year Mahmud's army, after plundering Gandhara and crossing the Jehlum, approached Lohara which was, at that time, a well-fortified citedal in the south on way to Kashmir. The government at Srinagar had probably been anticipating this and had, therefore, taken the necessary precautions to defend the country. A big garrison equipped with sufficient arms and supplied with ample provisions was ready to meet the invader. The enemy was barred from proceeding further. Mahmud laid a siege to the fort but could not capture it though he made great efforts for many weeks. Meanwhile, Sangramaraja, after consultations with Srilekha his only reliable and wise councillor (for Tunga had died by now), despatched more troops to reinforce the garrison in the fort. Then came winter with its bitter chill and the terrible snow-storms which caused heavy casualties in the Afghan armies. With a heavy heart Mahmud had to own defeat and return by the way he had come. In the series of military adventures which the sultan had undertaken to plunder India this was the one that miscarried. Nowhere else was he repulsed or forced to retire without achieving his objective. It is not surprising that he felt sore at his discomfiture and till the end of his days he dreamt of driving his caravan triumphantly through the green and fragrant dales of Kashmir.

Mahmud's repulsion added to the lustre of Sangramaraja

and enhanced the prestige and popularity of Srilekha. She became all in all in the government; her commands could not be disobeyed with impunity and nothing could be done without securing her explicit orders.

Srilekha was not only a gifted administrator ; she was also a liberal social reformer. She disliked the restrictions imposed by the caste system and would recognise merit wherever she found it. In order to give a lead to her people the queen married her own princess, Lothika, to a Brahman youth, Preman, Superintendent of the Convent of Didda, because he possessed knowledge, beauty and wealth. Such an unorthodox move was unknown in the history of the royal dynasties ; it was a revolutionary step that only Srilekha was bold enough to take. No wonder the Brahman historian Kalhana expresses great surprise at it. He remarks : "What a contrast between a royal princess worthy of a haughty king capable of bearing the burden of the world and he whose hand is moist with water by accepting gifts—the petty-minded Brahman".[9]

Sangramaraja passed away in 1028 A.D. Sometime before his death he had appointed his eldest son Hariraja as the heir-apparent and given him the bath of coronation. The new king was a good and generous man ; the ruling chiefs and the feudatories adored him, but he did not survive for more than twenty-two days. Mystery surrounds his death of which the causes are not clear. Srilekha was accused of getting him assassinated but Kalhana records that it was only an unconfirmed rumour. The charge appears to have originated from the fact that immediately after the sudden death of Hariraja the queen-mother announced her desire to ascend the throne and indeed made the necessary preparations for the purpose. But her powerful opponents among whom was her foster-brother, Sagara, conspired to foil her plans. Unaware of the hostile group, Srilekha completed the paraphernalia for the coronation but when on the auspicious day she was having the ceremonial bath, Ekangas, the royal bodyguards, crowned Kalsha, the queen's infant son, in another part of the palace. Realising that any resistance would give birth to a destructive civil war, Srilekha smilingly accepted the fait accompli and consented to be the regent of the infant-king. For years afterwards in that capacity she managed the state affairs and played

9. Ibid., VII, 12.

no less a prominent part than that she would have played as a ruling queen.

The reports of the rift between the queen-mother and influential councillors, and also the coronation of an infant tempted the old ememies of Kashmir to invade the country. Vigraharaja, a brother of Sangramaraja, came with an army from Lohara to depose Kalsha and seize the throne. After overpowering the armed guard at the frontier, he levelled the post-buildings with the ground and entered Kashmir. Like hurricane he passed over the Madhavaraja (South Kashmir now known as Maraz) and appeared on the outskirts of the capital within two and a half days. Srilekha who was conscious of her responsibilities as the Regent, was not the person to feel frightened or cowed down. Forthwith, she ordered the war bugles to be sounded and people invited to defend their homeland. A contingent of the royal army was despatched to meet the enemy and drive him back. In the meantime, however, Vigraharaja was successful in capturing Lothika Matha a massive edifice in the suburbs of Srinagar. The enemy made it his headquarters from where the operations were to be conducted ; the cream of his soldiery was stationed here.

The Royal Forces, under the directions of Srilekha, made their concerted attacks on the Lothika Matha and defeating the outer sentinels set fire to the entire structure. Those sheltered inside were reduced to ashes and those massed outside took to their heels ; and Vigraharaja was routed.

Srilekha was equally resolute in supressing recalcitrant officials and rebellious nobles. Kalhana says that till the last day of her life she was intent upon suppressing lese-majestie.

By the time Kalsha attained majority and was capable enough to assume the rulership of the land Sri Lekha had grown fairly old. She had no more any desire to enjoy power and was happy to relinquish the authority and retire to a life of seclusion and worship.

In the days of her glory and power Srilekha built two monasteries for the benefit of monks, ascetics and nuns, one in the name of her husband and another in the name of her son, Hariraja.

(5) Suryamati

How effectively the queens have wielded power while kings were on the throne can be seen from the hectic life of Suryamati

consort of King Ananta who ruled Kashmir from 1028-1063 A.D. This monarch was crowned when the ferocious armies of Mahmud had overran many neighbouring countries including Gandhara. Udabhandpura, the renowned capital of the Shahi dynasty, had been destroyed, political confusion reigned in the whole North-Western India ; the members of the ruling family, poets and philosophers, savants and scholars were forced to flee from their homeland. Never have two countries been more united culturally as were Kashmir and Gandhara in the ancient and medieval times. One looked upon the other as its best friend in days of need. So when the calamity befell the people of Gandhara where would they have repaired but to Kashmir. Among the princes who sought shelter in the valley were Anangpal, Diddapal and Rudrapal. King Ananta welcomed them with open arms and, rather extravagantly, fixed fabulous sums as their allowances. But the princes misused the benefactions of the liberal monarch.

Suryamati was a sister of Rudrapal's wife. For this reason Ananta was excessively generous towards the fugitive princes and connived at their misdeeds. But when they started hatching petty intrigues and causing miner disturbances they incurred the wrath of the queen who refused to wink at any disorderly behaviour. For the first time Suryamati intervened in the affairs of state by chastising the Pals. How she would have finally dealt with the mischief-mongers is a matter for conjecture; for Rudrapal soon died of a skin disease and other princes followed him after brief intervals.

The unpremeditated intervention afforded Suryamati the opportunity to get initiated in the politics of the country and have an idea of the inner workings of the government. King Ananta was gratified to learn that his spouse was gifted with uncommon understanding and could be of immense assistance to him. When the Pals were removed by the hand of death the king and the queen joined hands to consolidate their power and work for the welfare of the people.

The Pals had encouraged disloyal elements and even Tribhavana, the Commander-in-Chief of the royal armies, had been infected with the virus of treason. With unimpeachable heroism and undiminished valour King Ananta subdued the rebels. The chief of Dardistan despatched a Muslim army to support an insurrectionary group but the brave monarch vanquished them

and restored peace throughout his dominions.

Hardly had the country settled down in tranquillity when the royal couple lost their handsome prince Rajaraja while he was quite young. This so upset the parents that they gave up residence at the palace and took their abode in a hut near the temple of Sadashiva. Kalhana says that from that time onwards to his own day the Kings of Kashmir abandoning the residence of former royal dynasties made their residence in that very place. It became a usage with them which they could not contravene.[10]

As everywhere under the feudal system of government, Kashmir did not have any regular defence forces; each feudal lord was expected to have a specified contingent under him ready for the service of liege-lord. But experience of the insurrections taught Ananta to be more methodical and he, for the first time in the history of Kashmir, organised an army and paid it regularly from state treasury.

Ananta was magnanimous, kind and brave. He was proficient in the arts of peace and war. He successfully led armies on the battlefield and having humbled the enemies he generally forgave them. Even Tribhavana, the treacherous Commander-in-chief was granted his life when cowering under thrust of javelin he sued for royal mercy.

But Ananta was a spend-thrift and squandered wealth on luxurious living. He was a great lover of *tambula* leaf (*Pan*) and betel nut which is not grown in Kashmir, and was imported from outside. Gay parties were frequently held on extensive scale in the palace and elsewhere when the king enjoyed tambula leaf in company with other merry makers. Enormous sums were spent on such revelries that formed part of the riotous gatherings. The constant need of the leaves and nuts brought the king under the baneful influence of one Padmaraja, a foreign *Pan* magnate, who cleverly appropriated almost the entire revenue of the kingdom on account of the supply of luxury goods. Having exhausted the coffers, Ananta gradually sold his jewellery but could not control his pernicious habit. The matters came to such a pass that he pawned even "the crown decorated with five crescents as well as the lion-throne" for the money which he had to pay to Padma.

Unlike the king, Queen Suryamati was not addicted to the vicious habit and, indeed, had all along been admonishing and

10. Ibid., VII, 187s.

persuading him to give up his ruinous ways but to no purpose. When, however, the matters worsened and the honour and dignity of the crown and the throne were at stake she had to intervene. It was more than she could bear. The two emblems of royalty were required for use in the Hall of Audience on auspicious occasions. They had to be fetched on monthly ceremonial days from the house of the creditor. It occasioned disgrace for every member of the ruling family ; the queen had to hang her head in shame at the very thought of the royal insignia being in the possession of an alien trader. She was violently shaken ; she had arrived at a turning point in her career.

Acting firmly, Suryamati overruled the king for the first time and forbade the holding of gala parties ; she took drastic steps to restore sobriety and sanity in the court circles. She paid Padmaraja out of her own treasury and having secured the crown and the throne ordered his externment from the valley as also that of another foreigner, Dallaka, a jester through whom the king had been robbed of his wealth. Thereafter, the queen applied her undivided mind to the problems facing the country. First of all she prepared plans for reform and reconstruction ; she spent all her private treasure on the welfare of the people ; she bent her energies to eradicate corruption and to purify the administration of many evils. The public recognition of the good work done by the queen pushed Ananta into the background. He was reduced to a figurehead and had to carry out the behests of the energetic and capable Suryamati. Writes Kalhana : "From that time onwards it was the queen who applied herself to the affairs of state while the king having ceased to talk about his exploits was content to carry on what had to be done"[11] But conceit or arrogance were no faults of Suryamati ; she never behaved in a way as to make King Ananta feel the sting of his inferior status or eclipsed regality.

Having restored the financial equilibrium, Queen Suryamati turned her attention to redress the manifold grievances of the people. To meet his growing wants, Anantadeva was always in need of more and more money. Experienced and wise ministers had refused to squeeze people beyond their capacity. The king had, therefore, appointed men of low culture and mean birth to high posts of responsibility. A hair-cutter Kshema had become an adviser on financial affairs and guided the king

11. Ibid., VII, 199s,

in levying unknown imposts and taxes on the people. An ordinance was promulgated which made it incumbent on everyone to declare his savings; the quality and value of gold had to be recorded to enable the authorities to exact one-twelfth as the king's share. While making the entries and the assessments, the government officials plundered the citizens and molested their wives. Suryamati effected changes not only in the Regulations but also in the personnel of the state machinery. She dismissed the incapable and cruel upstarts, imprisoned the guilty and executed some whose heinous crimes were proved and brought home to them. She appointed Haldhara, a Vaishya, as the prime minister for he had been in her service for a long period and had by merit of his loyalty, devotion and diligence gradually risen from a subordinate post to a responsible position. Soon the Vaishya endeared himself to the king as well. Under the guidance of the queen, Premier Haldhara introduced reforms in several departments and chances of harassment of the citizens were minimised. Haldhara reannexed certain adjoining territories under the sovereignty of Kashmir which had, during the days of mal-administration, declared their independence.

With peace restored on all sides and prosperity ruling the land, Suryamati started the construction of public buildings in the tradition of the great rulers of the past. She founded Gaurishvara and erected, on the bank of the Vitasta, the holy Subhatamatha (Subhata was the queen's second name). On the occasion of the consecration of Sadhashiva temple, Suryamati is reported to have made munificent gifts of cows, horses, gold, precious stones and the like. In the name of her younger brother Asha Chandra, she built a matha and attached an *agrahara* to it. In the name of another brother, Sillana, and of her husband, the righteous lady constructed two monasteries in the vicinity of Vijayesha and Amresha respectively. At the same time she presented, at the sacred town of Vijayeshwara, one hundred and eight *agraharas* to learned Brahmans. In the name of her husband again she bestowed *agraharas* and provided for the endowments of Trishula, Banalinga and the like.

Suryamati possessed a restless spirit and boundless ambitions. She could not remain content with the achievements; but there was, in her opinion, nothing more to be done within the borders of her homeland. She, therefore, thought of bringing some

foreign territories under subjugation. With that purpose in view she organised a huge army adequately equipped with armour and fully furnished with provisions and other requirements. Considering herself to be strong and capable enough to control the administration, she deputed Anantdeva at the head of the army on an expedition of conquest. Premier Haldhara was commanded to accompany him. The first victim of this campaign was Salaraja of Champa (modern Chamba). He was defeated and deposed and another prince of Ananta's choice was set upon the throne. But in Vallapura the Kashmir armies suffered heavily and, but for the heroism of Haldhara, the war would have ended in the king's defeat. He did not fare better at Urasa where his passage was blocked by the enemy and it was with great difficulty and the timely assistance of the Commander-in-Chief that Anantdeva could make a successful retreat.

The reports of these untoward incidents awakened the slumbering hostile elements inside Kashmir that could never be exterminated. In Kramaraja (now Kamraz or North Kashmir) the Damaras kicked up a row. The dazzling success of Suryamati in whatever she laid her hands upon and the efficient administration of Haldhara had demoralised the enemies of the royal house. The disloyal sections had deemed it advisable to lie low and wait for an opportunity to raise their heads. Now they thought their time had come. Spreading false and unfounded rumours to discredit the men in power has ever been the first weapon in the armoury of rebels in Kashmir. The Damaras effectively wielded it to gain their end. Currency was given to a report that Haldhara had betrayed the king which necessitated the retreat of the Kashmir forces. Giving credence to the rumour Asha Chandra, brother of the queen, got the premier arrested and imprisoned. But the just Suryamati forthwith instituted an inquiry into the grave charge ; it was found out that Haldhara was innocent and had been maliciously victimised. He was honourably acquitted, released and reinstated in his exalted office. With her own camp united and the differences among the councillors resolved, the queen could speedily bring the rowdy Damara clique to their knees.

Ananta had been on the throne for thirty-five years ; he had grown old, weak in body and feeble in mind. His unfitness to rule was notorious and all well-wishers of the state were concerned about the future of the government. Suryamati

prevailed upon the king to abdicate in favour of his son Kalsha, thinking that in this way she would safeguard the interests of the royal dynasty during her own lifetime. But some far-sighted courtiers, including Haldhara, who probably assessed the real worth of the prince, disapproved of the decision. Nevertheless, Suryamati remained adamant and instructed Chamberlain Ranaditya to go ahead with the preparations for the coronation. In October-November 1063 A.D. Kalsha was thus sprinkled with the sacred water and crowned as the King of Kashmir.

Suryamati had entertained great hopes in Kalsha but these did not materialise after he was installed on the throne. He did not prove a worthy inheritor of power. He lacked the qualities of a good ruler and a competent administrator. Being young, he was inexperienced and unacquainted with the principles of statesmanship and the secrets of diplomacy. As ill-luck would have it, Kalsha's parents too contributed to his inefficiency and confusion. Anantdeva did not allow him a free hand to govern and under the instigation of certain ministers tried to retake power into his own hands though he allowed Kalsha to remain the titular monarch. To make the matters worse, the old king nominated Utkarsha, second son of Kalsha, a toddler born of princess Ramlekha, as his representative. Suryamati herself felt jealous of the pomp and show of her daughter-in-law who on becoming the queen wore more ornamental dresses and costly jewellery.

The royal house thus divided against itself invited opposition and the hostile sections suppressed for years were astir afresh. When signs of disorder became visible Suryamati, forgetting her grievances, rose equal to the occasion. She invited Jinduraja, a resourceful brave man whom Ananta had exiled and appointed him Minister of Interior. With one stroke this dignitary brought all refractory Damaras under control. Their chief, the one-eyed Shobha of Degrama who had been the headache of the government, was attacked and killed. Jinduraja's phenomenal success in dealing with the internal disturbances paved the way for his promotion to the more responsible position of Minister of War. In the capacity of the Commander-in-Chief he conquered Rajapuri and forced the chief of that principality to pay an annual tribute. Jinduraja soon became an eye sore and no one detested him more than the bed-ridden Haldhara. At the instigation of the dying premier, Anantadeva disarmed Jinduraja and got him arrested by one of his trusted

commanders, Bijja. The fabric of the state organisation was rent again by mutual suspicions, jealousies and hatreds.

Meanwhile, King Kalsha had fallen in bad company and was descending into the mire of immorality by resorting to caddish ways and by committing shameless deeds. Some do-nothing and vagabond Shahi princes were his chief pals. He had accepted the guidance of a certain Pramada Kantha, an unscrupulous and ill-reputed Guru (Brahman priest), who did not hesitate to approach even his own daughter for sexual intercourse. A lowbred man, Chanka, whose nose had been cut off in a mid-night drunken orgy, was appointed a minister and given the title of Thakkura (petty chief). Kalsha engaged five procurers and paid them lavishly for the purpose of enticing handsome damsels to satisfy his carnal passions.

Led by rogues, rascals and evil-characters, the youthful king gradually sunk deep in the morass of sexual excesses. He forsook all sense of decency and jumped over the confines of moderation. Nothing remained sacred in his eyes. In utter shamelessness he made incestuous advances to Kallana, the sister of Anantadeva and her daughter Naga. Afraid of the public gaze, the king accompanied by a gang of wicked men roamed from house to house under cover of darkness in hunt for beautiful women. In one of such nocturnal rounds he went to meet the voluptuous daughter-in-law of Jinduraja by appointment in her own appartment. But the Chandala guards posted outside the tryst accosted him. A brawl followed in the course of which blows with clenched fists were hurled at him and he was rescued by his personal staff only when it was announced that the wretched victim was King Kalsha.

The reports about the ugly incident travelled swiftly and both Suryamati and Anantadeva came to know of it before daybreak. Their righteous indignation prompted them to act drastically and decisively. Says Kalhana : "Both, after having wept long for the son through love woven with shame and sorrow, made a resolution to imprison him who had been guilty.[12] The old couple planned to place Harsha, eldest of their grandsons born of princess Bappika, on the throne.

Early next morning, Kalsha was summoned by Anantadeva to appear before him. Trembling, the accused presented himself to answer for his misdeeds. Having brought the grave charges

12. Ibid., VII 318s.

home to the son who had little to say in his defence, Anantadeva slapped him on his face and ordered him to give up his dagger, the emblem of sovereignty. This chastisement would have probably mended the affairs and forced the young king to abandon his sinful path. But Suryamati had a sneaking affection for her son which disabled her to make an impartial appraisal of the situation. When Kalsha was gone in a sullen and dejected mood, she taunted the old king for being so harsh and exacting; she hurried after Kalsha and consoled him which raised the drooping spirit of the erring youth and heartened his mean companions to continue their evil course.

Anantadeva, however, was determined to thoroughly execute his plan and with that aim in mind he proceeded personally to the apartments of Kalshadeva to arrest him. But the young king's partisans, emboldened by Suryamati's moral support, would not allow him to enter with his retainers. Incensed by this effrontery, Anantadeva left the capital and went to live at Vijayeshwara. Then followed a destructive civil war which destroyed all the good work that Suryamati had done for nearly three decades; it undermined the foundations of the state and ruined the economic and social life of the people.

In the rift between the father and the son, poor Suryamati became utterly confused; she was divided in mind. Her strong sense of devotion to Anantadeva was matched by her intense love for Kalsha. She wanted to dissociate from neither. The vexed queen employed her ingenuity, experience and resources to mediate between the two but since she was blind to the faults of Kalsha her constant efforts met with failure. She lived with Anantadeva but invariably sided with her son notwithstanding his manifest criminal behaviour.

Anantadeva was more popular than his son among the people and wielded no little influence. Besides, the coffers full of priceless jewels, precious stones, gold and other valuables were still in his possession. His departure for Vijayeshwara would have dealt a severe blow at the prestige of Kalsha and the reputation of the government. When, therefore, he had barely reached Pampur the young king and his consort quickly followed and entreated him to return. Suryamati prevailing upon him, Anantadeva agreed but only after a few days, in May 1079 A.D. feeling that the son was incorrigible, the old man acted on his previous resolve. This time he took away all his movable

property with him and left behind only the palace buildings for Kalsha. The royal ladies loaded the boats with their possessions of all kinds and departing did not leave even iron nails behind in their apartments. The entire wealth of the state was thus concentrated at Vijayeshwara (modern Vijbror). The dignitaries and nobles too followed Ananta and made their residence in that town. Bands of Rajputras, cavaliers, men-at-arms and notable Damaras fixed their abode in the vicinity of the aged sovereign. Srinagar locked a deserted city and Vijayeshwara was humming with life. It proved a more effective punishment for King Kalsha than his dethronement and incarceration.

The shock treatment meted out to him beneficially shook Kalsha out of his torpor. Abandoning his evil habits, frivolous ways and wicked companions, he diligently applied himself to effect wholesome changes in his government. He appointed capable men to high offices and formulated plans for amelioration of social and economic conditions. He invited scholars and qualified persons to advise him in matters of state. He encouraged traders and farmers to rehabilitate the shattered economy of the land. So far so good. But Kalsha nursed a deep hatred against his father, the venerable old king. Through Jayananda, Prime Minister, he secured big loans from the wealthy traders and having won over the infantry to his side, he made up his mind to retaliate. Then escorted by Chief Councillor Bijja, he led an army and making Avantipura his headquarters he launched operations to destroy Anantadeva along with his supporters.

The patricidal intentions of Kalsha did not remain hidden for long. It was obvious the issue could be clenched only on the battlefield. Cavalry still swore allegiance to Anantadeva and Damara chiefs too remained loyal to him. He released Jinduraja from prison and made him the Supreme Commander of his troops. With war preparations afoot on both sides there was a commotion in the kingdom and people were terrified. But none was so unhappy as Suryamati who was torn between her loyalty to Anantadeva and affection for Kalsha. She could not sit silent and view with equanimity the impending disaster. Striving with all her being she begged of her very wrathful husband an armistice for two days. Having secured this boon she at once despatched her trusted emissaries, Maya and other Brahmans, to Kalsha with pressing messages to desist from acting disloyally. The distracted queen reminded her son of the

tremendous power that Anantadeva wielded, the vast army that was at his command and the enormous wealth which was in his possession. She contrasted Kalsha's own impecunious condition and inadequate resources with it all. She argued that Anantadeva had abdicated, relinquished the kingdom and taken up residence in a sanctuary ; therefore the young king had nothing to fear from the retired old man ; Kalsha could enjoy the realm to his liking. Suryamati warned her son of his doom if he persisted in his suicidal resolve. This secret message produced a sobering effect and Kalsha consulted his safety in retreat.

But the minds of the restless father and the vengeful son were never free from mutual suspicions and fears. Besides, the tale-bearers inflamed their passions and augmented the enmity. Suryamati's position became increasingly unenviable. Partly impelled by the responsibilities of mediation but mainly moved by deep affection for her son, she frequently taunted her husband whenever he approached her with sundry complaints against Kalsha. Anantadeva was still thinking of divesting Kalsha of the powers and privileges of kingship because he was convinced of the son's inefficiency, immorality and treasonous behaviour. At one time he contemplated to invite one of his distant relations to take charge of the kingdom. Suryamati was frightened at such angry expressions of the old king and with a view to protect the interests of her descendants she successfully persuaded her husband to nominate Harsha, their eldest grandson, as his successor.

Thereupon, Harsha was summoned to Vijayeshwara. King Kalsha had an inkling into the minds of his parents and, with the purpose of frustrating their designs, he had kept a strict watch over the movements of his son. But the young prince eluded the detectives and reaching Vijayeshwara presented himself before Anantadeva. No time was lost in performing the Abhisheka ceremony and declaring Harsha the lawful king of Kashmir. Although the proclamation unnerved Kalsha and weakened his position, it added to the political confusion and caused immense misery to the people. Feeling exasperated, the leading Brahmans resorted to the age-old practice of hunger-strike to force the father and the son to patch up their differences. Within a few days the atmosphere was surcharged with excitement and tension. Very wisely Suryamati seized the opportunity to end the domestic strife. Through her intercession Anantadeva

forgave Kalsha his past aberrations and the aged couple returned to Srinagar to live in the royal palace there.

It appears Anantadeva sincerely desired to forget and forgive. But Kalsha continued to bear malice against his parents and was secretly planning to imprison them. His plot, however, miscarried ; Anantadeva's spies warned him in time and before they had been in the capital for more than seventy days the harassed couple hastily repaired to Vijayeshwara. Kalsha could not harm them beyond burning stacks of hay for their horses and killing a number of infantry men by sword and fire.

Anantadeva's safe departure made Kalsha wild and furious. To defeat the old king on battle-field was well-nigh impossible and so long as his father survived Kalsha thought he could not live in peace and rule over the kingdom undisturbed. Prince Harsha was with his grandparents which was a source of constant threat to the young king's position. It was evident that so long as the aged monarch possessed inexhaustible wealth he could easily command respect, enlist support and wield power. To reduce him to the status of a supplicant, Kalsha hit upon a fiendish idea. He employed men to set fire to the flourishing town of Vijayeshwara on all sides. The nefarious deed proved eminently successful. It was the biggest conflagration recorded in Kashmir history. The magnificent city, cynosure of all eyes, with its numerous grand edifices, palaces, temples, viharas and thousands of houses was reduced to ashes. While Vijayeshwara was in flames Kalsha was dancing with joy. Anantadeva's entire wealth was consumed in the fire. Not to speak of the poor classes, within the span of a few hours prosperous grandees and well-to-do nobles were faced with dire poverty. *Rajatarangini* records that some princes did not have even clothes to hide their nakedness for the remaining night. Next morning Suryamati found a jewelled *linga* in the debris and sold it to a trader of the family of Takas for seventy lakhs with which she purchased the necessities of life. An idea of the prosperity of Vijayeshwara can be formed from the fact that when subsequently the heaps of ashes were searched property worth millions was secured in the shape of lumps of gold, other precious metals and jewels under it. This was sufficient to rebuild the town albeit the previous grandeur could not be attained.

Aware of the old king's plight and no more afraid of his

power and prestige, Kalsha pestered him to leave Vijayeshwara and proceed to Parnotsa. Anantadeva was loath to do so but such was the irrational regard and blind love of Suryamati for her son that she tried to induce her husband even to agree to this. However, for the first time in his married life Ananta stood firm, opposed his wife and gave vent to his feelings in harsh tone. He narrated his pathetic story: how he sacrificed everything to please Suryamati and obeyed her meekly though he could envisage the disastrous consequences which were bound to follow an effeminate behaviour on his part. The provoked old king scathingly criticised women in general and his own queen in particular. Bitterly he remarked that it was surprising when sons should wish well of their fathers Kalsha wanted him to leave the sanctuary of Vijayeshwara and go outside his homeland; and the unkindest cut was that the queen agreed with the cruel proposal. Overpowered by anger and having momentarily lost all self-restraint Anantadeva unburdened his mind of a suspicion, a secret, which he had long hidden in his bossom. He burst out: "There occurs to my mind today the rumour which has been oft-repeated that he who was born in another family had been surreptitiously introduced by you (in our house). The son who is hostile to the kindred, and who is without affection for father may be known to be of alien seed."[13] There was a substratum of truth in this charge; Kalsha was not a scion of the royal dynasty.

Queen Suryamati was cut to the quick; she was deeply vexed and humiliated by her husband's raillery. She felt all the more hurt because she was unaccustomed to such reproofs from Anantadeva. Aroused, flabberghasted and enraged she hit back like a wounded lioness. Addressing him with epithets such as lack-lustre, anchorite, stupid, superannuated and dullard, she sneeringly reminded him that without her he would have been nowhere. This was more than Anantadeva could endure. Straightaway he took hold of a dagger and plunged it into his onus. The wound proved fatal and caused his instantaneous death. In October 1081 A.D. the poor king expired in front of the image of Vijayeshwara.

Stunned by the rash deed of her husband Suryamati now displayed virtues of serenity and fortitude in face of the biggest misfortune that befell her in life. The first thing that she did

13. *Rajatarangini*, VII, 434-435s.

was to disburse the salaries and allowances of all dependents. retainers, officials and soldiers. Next, she made them swear by sacred libation that they would remain loyal to her grandson Harsha, and unswervingly labour for his success and welfare. She appointed one hundred selected warriors as the prince's body-guard. The foolish queen, profiting too late by experience, was convinced of the wickedness of her son. Warmly kissing Harsha-deva on his forehead she advised the prince : "Do 'not trust your father".

Thinking that she had made adequate arrangements for the future government of the country as best she could, Suryamati placed the mortal remains of Anantadeva in an elegantly decorated palanquin. It was borne by many rajahs on their shoulders and taken to the crematorium with the pomp as befitted the late monarch. The affection for her son was still lingering in her heart ; she vainly hoped that Kalsha would come to meet her for the last time. Repeatedly she looked towards the direction from which the residents of Srinagar poured in thousands, but when Kalsha did not turn up she put the dead body on the sandal wood-scented funeral pyre and burned herself along with it in the flames. Beloved of her servants Suryamati was followed by some of them in her death. Gangadhara, Takkibuddha, the palanquin-bearer Dandaka and maids Udda, Nonika and Valga joined her on the funeral pyre.

Suryamati was a woman of several virtues ; she was kind-hearted, passionate and indefatigable. She was an affectionate mother, a dutiful wife but an imprudent queen ; the weakness which dominated her whole being and darkened the later part of her life was the blind love for Kalsha. That she was patriotic and knew fully well the cause of her domestic disunity is borne out from what she said at the time of her death.

Before she performed the act of self-immolation Suryamati made two significant observations to the vast gathering of people who were weeping, crying and lamenting. She said, first, "those who die with the waters of the Vitasta inside them would, without doubt, find liberation like the expounders of the Vedas" ; and, secondly, "those who have been the cause of the fatal enmity between us two and our son may they, together with their families perish in few days."[14] Thus died Suryamati, disappointed, dejected and frustrated, the most distinguished of the queens-

14. Ibid., VII, 473-475a.

consort who played a conspicuous part in the history of Kashmir for nearly fifty years.

(6) Jayamati

Among the queens of Kashmir who were born of humble parents and could not claim any strain of nobility in their ancestry was Jayamati, spouse of King Uchchala (1101 A.D.—1111 A.D.). Her parentage is unknwon. When yet a suckling babe she was picked up from a street and adopted as a daughter by one dancing girl belonging to the family of danseuse Kanashravati. Because of her graceful physical form, Jayamati was initiated in the art of dancing by her adopted mother and in course of time she achieved mastery over it. She also learnt music and singing. Soon she was in demand at musical concerts and dancing festivals. Princes and nobles vied with each other in patronising her and showering valuable gifts over her. Her apartments were always crowded with young and wealthy men seeking pleasure in festivities of dance and music. It was in one of such gatherings that Jayamati met Uchchala and fell in love with him when he was an inconspicuous figure in the world of politics. The attraction was mutual and both intensely desired to be united by conjugal bonds. To do so, however, was beyond their power as, at the time, Jayamati was forced to accept the position of a mistress of an influential courtier, Mandalesha. But the star of the lovers was rising and some sunny days were in store for them. Mandalesha was slain in a street brawl which were common in those disturbed days. It afforded the golden opportunity to Jayamati for which she had patiently waited. Beaming with joy the youthful dancing girl joined Uchchala and became his wife. Fortune shone on the newly-wedded couple. In a civil war Harsha the ruling monarch was defeated, hunted down and murdered by the insurgents in 1101 A. D. and Uchchla chosen the new king in his place. In accordance with the ancient tradition Jayamati was crowned as his queen and as an inalienable part of the coronation ceremony the sacred water of *abhisheka* was sprinkled on her body.

King Uchchla was a good-intentioned ruler whose one great desire in life was to reform the administration and weed out corruption in officialdom. Jayamati proved of great assistance to him in this stupenduous task.

One of the notable blessings which Uchchla conferred upon

the people was the opening of dispensaries in different parts where medicine was distributed free to the sick. He abolished unjust imposts but levied sufficient taxes on the rich and well-to-do. With the finances thus raised he executad his well thought-out schemes for the advancement of the poverty-stricken and exploited classes. Uchchla's outstanding achievement in eradicating corruption has been acknowledged in glowing terms by historians. He put his finger at the sore point and accurately ascertained why and where the body ached. Completing his investigations, he dismissed every official found resorting to the evil practice of peculation in any form. Some of them whose guilt was serious he imprisoned and if he thought even this would not meet with the ends of justice, he ordered more dire punishments. A high functionary who had through trickery secured the title of Mahatma but was found to be mean and unfair in his dealings, was compelled by the king to wear hempen clothing in prison. Another senior officer, Bhut Bhischa, was made to dress like a strolling ministrel and to run like a Domba soldier on the high street. Says Kalhana : "The tall man with his beard tied up, an extravagant turban, the impaling stake in his hand and his kness and thighs tied together—who could help laughing at him."[15]

Uchchala discouraged flattery. He forbade flunkeys, backbiters and tale-bearers to approach him. "By torturing in a painful manner persons of whom Loshtadhara and others were the ring-leaders, who whispered evil in his ears, he made slander fallow."[16] Only men with independent views who would not hesitate to tell the truth at the king's face adorned his court and dominated his counsels.

It was a peculiar merit of Uchchala rarely possesed by autocrats that in punishing the culprits he was careful to see that their dependents were not harassed or touched. On no occasion did his officials persecute wives, sons, relatives or friends of those numerous offenders whose punishment he commanded because they were proved guilty. Such lenity and consideration had been unknown for centuries before Uchchala came to power. But it was in consonance with many other beneficial and sensible reforms which he had introduced. "Under the new king every

14. Ibid, VIII, 95s.
15. Ibid., VIII, 117s.

thing in the kingdom became new such as the etiquette of the court debates, administration and the rest."[17]

In first evolving the ideas of an enlightened administration and a sober society and then putting them into effect, Jayamati's share was by no means insignificant or unimportant. Though born of humble parts, bred in a family of professional dancing girls and maintained as mistress and concubine by certain vain courtiers, she acquitted herself creditably after she was given the coronation bath with King Uchchala. She was a charming wife, generous woman and a dignified queen. Kalhana who frequently expatiated on the foibles and frivolities of womankind has this to say about her : "Jayamati having through her husband's love occupied half the throne and attained the dignity of the queen-consort—privilege quite unobtainable for a commoner—had not disgraced it. For she had distinguished herself by her benevolence, charm of manners, munificence, partiality for the virtuous, tactfulness and gentle acts prominent among them being the relief of the destitute and the distressed."[18]

Jayamati's kind-heartedness once brought her into trouble with her husband. King Harsha's son Bhoja had been treacherously assassinated by an armed messenger even before that king was himself murdered by the insurgents. But Bhoja's infant son, Bhikshachara, was living and with the intention of wiping out the dynasty of his foe, Uchchala passed orders that the tiny prince should be drowned in the Vitasta. The infant was in charge of Jayamati when the executioners arrived and demanded that the doomed fellow be handed over to them under royal command. The innocent looks of the prince no less than his prattling sounds moved the queen to her depths and with great tactfulness she saved the life of Bhikshachara. But the secret was disclosed and Uchchala grew indifferent and cold towards her in consequence. Nevertheless, Jayamati remained steadfast in her devotion and sincerety to the last days of her life. And when King Uchchala was dastardly done to death by a group of disgruntled officers in the Audience Hall of his own palace the former dancing girl, concubine and mistress committed sati by entering the flames with the dead body of her beloved husband. "Then, as she was in the act of

17 Ibid., VIII,188s.

18 Ibid., VIII, 83s.

ascending the funeral pyre, the relic-seekers begging for ornaments looted her and caused hurt to her limbs."[19]

(7) Raddadevi

Of the several queens of King Jayasimha (1127--1154 A.D.), the contemporary of the great historian Kalhana, two have distinguished themselves by playing conspicuous parts in public life. Raddadevi, senior queen by virtue of age, had born many sons to the king, the eldest of whom was Gulhana. The queen was respected for her serenity and reserve. She rarely appeared in public and was content with giving her sane advice to the king mostly within her apartments in the palace. Her chief virtue consisted in making the kings's domestic life free from all cares and worries so that he may all the more easily bear the burdens of state. It was through her tactfulness and intelligence that the household affairs were conducted smoothly and the queens lived together happily and well.

But Jayasimha knew that Raddadevi possessed more virtues than she would admit and that she was capable of undertaking graver responsibilities than the management of the royal household. So when, for reasons of state, the king decided to install Prince Gulhana on the throne of Lohara, a strategic tributary principality on the southern border of Kashmir, he commended the queen to represent His Majesty at the coronation and assist the local authorities to make the ceremony a grand success. Prince Gulhana was a boy of six years. Raddadevi was expected to lead him into the principality and by crowning him in a befitting manner impress the nobles and grandees present with the might of the suzerain power.

It was customary during those days that besides the ministers, officials and nobles, all the feudal lords, tributary chiefs, estate owners and fief-holders had to be present on such occasions to pay their homage to the overlord in an open levee. The prince being a minor, the duty of holding the durbar fell on Raddadevi. It was an onerous task. The queen, because of her known reluctance to come into limelight and to take a prominent share in public affairs, was not reckoned the most suitable person for this job. But to the delight of the courtiers no less than to that of the common people, she was eminently successful in accomplishing the work that was entrusted to her. To

19. Ibid., VIII, 358s.

deputise for the king, accept the homage of hundreds of tributaries and respectable citizens and to respond appropriately to their salutations according to the respective status of each one of them was quite ticklish. Even a small error could occasion resentment and anger which would lead to harmful political repercussions. But Raddadevi proved to be quite adept in the art of dealing with those present in the august assembly and there was all-round satisfaction. The titled dignitaries felt honoured and happy to make obeisance to the queen. Says the poet-historian : "The iridescence of blood-red rubies on the tiaras of ruling chiefs paying homage made her feet appear pink like the half ripe barley."[20]

On return to Srinagar Raddadevi was publicly received by courtiers and the people with great eclat ; an address of appreciation was presented to her ; the king honoured her and paid deserved tributes to her qualities of statesmanship and understanding.

(8) Kalhanika

The second councillor-queen who figured prominently in politics during the rule of Jayasimha and made his throne secure, was Kalhanika. Her capability as a wise and skilful envoy was uncommon. When other means including the use of armed forces proved ineffective to subdue a vexatious enemy, it was the dexterity of the queen which helped to terminate the hostilities. Her elegant personality, refined manners, polished language and even charming rebukes worked where all else had failed the king to attain his objective.

King Jayasimha succeeded to the throne of Kashmir in 1127 A.D. when the country was passing through one of the grim phases of civil war. His father, Sussala, had been killed by disloyal elements in a fight and when the throne fell vacant there appeared no less than five pretenders to claim the right to rule. Their names were Lothana, Bhikshachara, Bhoja, Mallarjuna and Koshthana. Of these Bhikshachara had constantly plagued Sussala while in power and had in 1121 A.D. actually captured the throne for nearly six months. But Sussala had subsequently regained the kingdom and thwarted the enemy's further attempts to displace him. Nevertheless, Bikshachara did not forsake hopes and was only biding his time. Sussala's death and

20. Ibid., VIII, 3303s.

the confusion born of civil war re-kindled his desire to seize the lost power. Bhoja was the son of Salhana who had occupied the throne for a few days after the assassination of Uchchala. Other pretenders too were connected with the royal dynasty and could claim to have been descendants of princes who had ruled Kashmir albeit for very short durations.

After several skirmishes, Jayasimha, was successful in vanquishing Bhikshachara while he was holding the Lohara fortress. The royal forces laid a siege for months and forced him to fight or die by starvation inside the fort. It was an unequal battle in which Bhikshachara was slain along with many of his troops. The death of the most redoubtable and eminent of the pretenders disheartened the other claimants. And when the king too resorted to the policy of conciliation and appeasement side by side with the employment of armed forces, he was able, without much difficulty and bother, to subdue Lothana, Mallarjuna and Koshthaka. But Bhoja proved a hard nut to crack ; he was refractory and recalcitrant. Neither did armed expeditions frighten the prince into submission nor did diplomatic missions achieve any success in persuading him to give up opposition and negotiate for friendship with the king. He appeared to be a sworn enemy who was prepared to fight to the last. King Jayasimha could not feel secure so long as Bhoja continued to be in that rebellious mood ; nor could the country make any progress in presence of the unending civil war.

Bhoja was courageous, self-willed and sensitive ; above all he was self-respecting. In the tussle for power he had heterogeneous forces on his side. Besides the faithful followers he was supported in his campaign by some disgruntled state officials and certain chiefs in the north of Kashmir who were hostile to the rule of King Jayasimha for personal reasons. After sometime when the king was able to bring the confused situation under control and consolidate his gains, Bhoja's fortune began to wane. But the enemies of Jayasimha egged him on and sustained him in his opposition to the king. Because of his brilliant military career and the close relationship with the royal dynasty the prince's name was one to be conjured with. Large troops could be collected and influential people rallied round his flag. But Bhoja possessed a penetrating eye and could see through the game. He realized that he was being utilized as a tool and most of his partisans had their own axe to grind. Nevertheless, his

keen sense of self-respect did not permit him to make peace with Jayasimha and the civil war continued unabated.

King Jayasimha was a lover of peace. The desire that dominated him was the establishment of tranquillity in the kingdom and restoration of progressive regime in his lifetime. The internecine civil war foiled his plans and gave him no opportunity to put his laudable ideas into execution. He was sincerely anxious to end the hostilities and, consistent with the dignity of his position, he was ready to go to the utmost length to mollify his indefatigable antagonist. While pondering over the problem a bright idea struck him. He thought of despatching Kalhanika as a peace-emissary to Bhoja with offers of friendship. Her past record qualified her for the onerous task.

From the day she had arrived in the palace, Kalhanika had acted as a friend to Jayasimha's other wives by bringing about reconciliation where there was any misunderstanding, lack of harmony, or open breach. She was free from overbearing pride that common vice of the ladies of royal house ; her mind was never upset, unbalanced or unhinged. She took sound decisions on affairs of state after considering pros and cons of problems in consultation with her trusted advisers. She was beloved of the people, popular in the royal household, respected by the courtiers and admired by the politicians. Above all, the king reposed full confidence in her because she, of all his companions, could read his mind accurately.

On being asked by King Jayasimha to express her views on the problem of civil war, Kalhanika observed in her characterstic, forthright and dignified manner that in the case of Bhoja no other than a straightforward and magnanimous course was indicated.

In the long-drawn hostilities, Bhoja had grown sick of his confederates and was inclined to settle the dispute on honourable terms. But certain ministers of the Kashmir Government were distrustful of the prince who had been illusive and unpredictable. His peace-messages were therefore treated with caution and reserve. Kalhanika alone among the king's councillors, was of the opinion that even the least opportunity should be seized to end the warfare by offering liberal and magnanimous terms to the enemy. Finally, acting on her advice, Jayasimha commanded two courtiers Dhanya and Rilhana, to proceed to the scene of battle, to contact Bhoja and to try to guess his intentions. For many

days the two experienced politicians made sifting enquiries into the whole affair and on return made a hopeful report to the king. Thereupon, Jayasimha took a bold step and appointing Kalhanika as his plenipotentiary charged her with the mission of ending the hostilities on terms that she deemed fit and dignified. Says Kalhana : "Dhanya having reported this straightforward conduct (of Bhoja) the serene king whose wits were not inexperienced then pondered over the completion of the pact for peace which had been imperilled and without revealing the decision or his state of mind to others he sent the queen on the journey to Taramulaka accompanied by the ministers."[21] Despite the popularity of the queen and though she enjoyed the reputation of being sagacious and tactful not all grandees and statesmen were sure of the wisdom of Jayasimha's decision. Kashmir women had many achievements to their credit ; yet jealous men were not wanting to cavil at the action of the king when he ordered a queen to go on a hazardous mission of such crucial nature. Diplomats and ministers were left wondering about the outcome and hesitated to hazard a guess. However, Jayasimha was firm and decisive ; his commands were final and irrevocable.

Before embarking upon the historic mission the foresighted Kalhanika prayed for certain clarifications. The speech delivered by her at the time of departure and recorded by the contemporary historian who might have been present on the occasion shows how adept and experienced the queen was in the art of statecraft. She knew that mediation was a thankless job, that her mission was bound to create suspicions and jealousies, that in the discharge of responsibilities she would be called upon to exercise her independent judgment and that she shall have to employ extraordinary powers to stop fighting and conclude peace. She was conscious too of the presence of backbiters, mischief-mongers and traducers at the court who would not hesitate to poison the mind of the king. She rightly demanded assurance of protection against their virulent tongues. She argued : "When his mind is prejudiced by his sons, ministers, women and others even a good-naturad king, in anger, acts precipitately to the detriment of an unsuspecting person. Your majesty does not transgress a promise and whose word is infallible does indeed share with me as from one wassail-bowl

21. Ibid., VIII, 3096-3097a.

his drink of glory in three worlds. On the other hand if I should disregard life in order to save from destruction those whom it is my duty to save, I believe I should be selfish in tasting glory and appropriating it to myself.[22] Mark the fears clothed in diplomatic, courteous and pleasing language. As the subsequent developments showed Kalhanika's apprehensions were not entirely unfounded. But her impressive oration stood her in good stead and saved many an ugly situation from developing into a disaster while she was away. At the time of departure, however, the king calmed her palpitating heart and discounted her misgivings.

Kalhanika was accompanied by her own trusted councillors besides the two state ministers, Dhanya and Rilhana, and a number of experts and secretaries. A detatchment of the royal forces and a squad of Rajputras also formed part of the delegation.

The despatch of the peace mission under the leadership of the senior queen was misconstrued by the enemies of Jayasimha as a sign of weakness; it emboldened the various unfriendly elements to openly join the hostile camp; it gave an exaggerated importance to Bhoja and his partisans. Influential and powerful Damara chiefs of Nilashva, Devsarsa and Holda who had remained neutral until then precipitately sent offers of support to the prince and even despatched contingents of armed men to fight on his side as an earnest of their good faith and sincerety. That rendered the task of Kalhanika much more difficult; pessimists confidently predicted the failure of her diplomatic adventure.

Happily Bhoja proved a more prudent man than the circumstances warranted. He did not feel unduly elated at his seeming popularity nor was he influenced by the blandishments of his unreliable confederates. He was delighted to learn that Queen Kalhanika was coming to have peace pourparlers with him at the bidding of the king. His yearning had been fulfilled; his sense of self-respect vindicated. He is reported to have told his intimate comrades: "All these days one man has been leading another man into error; when the ladies of the family undertake meditation, who can remain estranged from one's kindred? In truth the desire to conclude peace has a hold on me."[23]

22. Ibid., VIII, 3104-3106s.
23. Ibid., VIII, 3117, 3118s.

But neither the old partisans nor the new allies of Bhoja were peace-minded. No sooner had the Royal Delegation arrived on the border than the enemy destroyed the bridge on the Vitasta at Suyyapura (Sopor) and many of the hostile leaders waited in boats on Mahapadma (Wolur lake) to annihilate the royal army with its commanders as well as the two prominent members of the delegation, Dhanya and Rilhana. The inimical Damaras of Bhangila were contemplating to invade Pattan while those of Shamla were planning a raid from the side of the Kshiptika (Kata kuhl). Trillaka, a Damara chief commanding sufficient following, was contriving to reach the Mahasarit (Tsunti kuhl) and the Damaras of Nilashava had designs to penetrate into the heart of Srinagar. In this way the first impact of the mission had only aggravated the situation and thrown the whole kingdom in turmoil; the throne itself was in jeopardy. It was obvious Kalhanika's responsibilities had enormously increased; the fate of the royal dynasty depended on the result of her endeavours; she had to tax her talents to the utmost to save the homeland.

The solidarity and success of the enemy rested on Bhoja. He was being pressed on all sides to break off the negotiations which had been opened and were in progress. His two chief allies, Balahara and Rajvadana, were intent upon resuming hostilities. The former repeatedly advised the prince to restart operations against the royal army and the latter at every step raised obstacles to frustrate the peace-efforts. The atmosphere was hardly conducive to the success of talks aiming at ending the civil war. The position of Kalhanika was unenviable; her suave demeanour, refined language and generous offers seemed unavailing. At a crucial stage in the negotiations smaller men became nervous, lost hope and were reduced to imbecility. But stout-hearted and ever-optimistic Kalhanika maintained her calm and preserved her dignity. One whole night passed in a state of uncertainty. With the royal troops in grave peril of being attacked any moment, with no hope af truce in sight, even the two ministers betrayed signs of restlessness and started chafing. Little thinking that the enemy might become recalcitrant they had brought only a small force of armed men with them which was not adequate enough to protect the delegation in case the negotiations proved abortive and the enemy restarted hostilities. They therefore felt as if they were suddenly caught in a rapid vortex and were like helpless persons carried away by rushing currents in an inundation.

Happily, however, Bhoja was resolved to come to terms; but apprehensive if he aired his views, Balahara and the men of his kind were sure to go out of control and launch a furious attack on the royal forces immediately, he adroitly dodged them by declaring that the attack is only postponed till the next morning. Reports of such pronouncements reached the royal camp which intrigued Kalhanika and her colleagues. But the queen persisted in her endeavours. Several messages were exchanged between Bhoja and Kalhanika during the remaining part of the night. We are deprived of the pleasure of reading them, for none has been preserved; those written by the queen must, one may guess, have been charming, persuasive and appealing. For, before the daybreak, Bhoja had decided to act and, without notifying his partisans, meet Kalhanika in the royal camp.

The prince was personally unknown to the Kashmiri notables. But when early next morning a handsome youth, elegantly dressed, proceeded towards them in a litter and when Damara chiefs in the enemy camp ran in panic to stop him every member of the Royal Delegation concluded that the advancing person was Bhoja. Determined to resist the pleadings and spurn the threats of his untrustworthy partisans, Bhoja crossed the river and approached the royal camp. He was warmly welcomed and a grand reception was held in his honour, the chief feature of which was an address of congratulations read by Minister Dhanya.

A shattering blow was dealt at the Damaras and other groups who had collected together with the evil intention of destroying the rule of Jayasimha. The hostiles had banked on the personality of Bhoja to execute their nefarious designs. Without the prince the enemy forces looked like a headless trunk capable of doing nothing. The partisans were in tumult each solicitous about his own welfare. These events took place in May 1145 A.D.

Bhoja's first audience with Kalkanika was remarkable. Unknown to each other, the queen greeted him after he saluted her on arrival, like a beloved son and not depending on her servants she thoughtfully arranged for all his requirements and necessities including food. In a short conversation that followed Bhoja was impressed by the absence of any artificiality in her demeanour and was happy to find that she was frank, graceful

and sweet and that, therefore, he had not erred in making his momentous choice.

The rebellion had been quelled and its leader secured. That was an achievement of which any well wisher of the state and a friend of the king could be proud. But Kalhanika's anxieties were not yet over ; her mission was only half-done. Jayasimha had commanded her to win over and conduct Bhoja into the royal presence. The prince was hesitant to proceed further and was persuaded to come on certain specific assurances. Now that he had leapt in the dark and solely confided in her, Kalhanika realised that it was her moral responsibility to see that the pledges were redeemed. Some of the top-ranking members of the Royal Delegation were puffed up with the success and wanted to adopt a supercilious attitude towards the prince. They were over-enthusiastic to carry Bhoja swiftly into the august presence of King Jayasimha. Bhoja's sensitive nature soon perceived the change which forced him to react violently and unfavourably to it. He expressed reluctance to move further and indeed declined to meet Jayasimha. He said he would like to go somewhere else. But Kalhanika was not the person who would leave her mission incompletely performed. She warned the indiscreet and haughty officials to behave and punished one or two for their bad manners. Speaking on her behalf Dhanya, in a conciliatory language, impressed upon Bhoja that nothing but good would come out of his journey to the capital and a meeting with the king. Instructions were also issued to accord a befitting reception to the prince in the villages and towns through which his way wended to Srinagar. Softened by the fascinating ways of the queen, Bhoja submitted and when on the route he saw the inhabitants standing with laudatory poems composed in his honour, the growing realisation of the correctness of his action was confirmed in his mind.

On arrival in the capital, Bhoja was conducted straight to the palace and atonce ushered into the Hall of Audience which was fully packed with people anxious to see him. The prince touched the king's feet in the traditional oriental manner when a younger person meets his elder, placed near the throne the dagger which he carried and then sat himself down before the sovereign. Jayasimha placing two fingers under Bhoja's chin observed : "You have not been captured in war nor are you even now to become a prisoner, hein ! Why then should we accept

this weapon which you have handed up."[24] In brief these were the conditions which Kalhanika had offered to him for his surrender and the prince felt reassured to hear them confirmed by the king. But when to express his sentiment of loyalty Bhoja protested that under the protecting and fostering wings of the benevolent monarch he no more needed any arms, King Jayasimha replied : "You are now like the plaintiff who when the issue has been joined has discharged the onus ; the burden on us however remains."[25] Bhoja reiterated that it was his ardent desire to submit to the will of the sovereign.

The interview having ended happily the prince rose to take leave but in doing so his turban fell down while bowing. Jayasimha promptly invested him with his own head-dress, an honour rarely done by kings to their inferiors, much less to erstwhile opponents. He also placed in the lap of the prince his own dagger as also the one that Bhoja had voluntarily surrendered, saying : "These weapons, given by me, you should wear or preserve them as sacred. You should have no reluctance in accepting them ; this is my command."[26] In this way every term of the pact which Kalhanika had made with Bhoja was implemented in the very first interview. As a matter of fact, the king was more magnanimous than the prince had expected him to be ; the royal interpretation of the terms was liberal. Kalhanika's patience and persistence bore luscious fruit ; the mission of mediation ended in a magnificient triumph.

In private, too, King Jayasimha maintained the same friendly, generous and noble attitude. The contemporary historian who was possibly furnished with an official account of this interesting episode graphically narrates how the king chatted with Bhoja in the inner apartment of the palace and how he introduced the prince to his other distinguished queen Raddadevi. Commending Bhoja to her, the King said : "He deserves to be welcomed, oh queen ! who has come here through friendliness and family affection," and the royal consort replied : "He is more than our sons to us."[27]

And now, the king followed by the prince went to meet Queen Kalhanika in her apartment to express their gratitude for

24. Ibid.. VIII, 3216s.
25. Ibid., VIII, 3220s.
26. Ibid., VIII, 3224s.
27. Ibid., VIII, 3243s.

the unique service she had rendered to both of them. The noble lady was overjoyed to find them together and smilingly told Bhoja : "Already you have become an intimate friend with the king." Considering this an opportune moment Kalhanika, without becoming boastful, made a brief report on the hazards of her mission and the daring part that Bhoja had played in the whole affair, She said : "It should not be forgotten that the prince repudiated the advice of his own friends and he to whom honour is the sole refuge has been transformed through affection for his kinsfolk." The queen added meaningfully : "If he had not come away succumbing to the difficulty of the task we might not have succeeded in preserving our exalted status nor in returning to our home."[28]

From a formidable foe who threatened to subvert the kingdom Bhoja had become a docile friend ready to champion the cause of the king and die for the welfare of the state. For transforming him thus Kalhanika's reputation and popularity had risen sky high. She achieved an unparalleled distinction and the king bestowed upon her the status of the First Councillor. Her advice in important matters of government was sought and valued.

With the restoration of tranquillity in the land Kalhanika proceeded on a pilgrimage to the holy shrines and historic places in the valley. She was followed in her train by feudatories and ministers of the state.

On return she directed her energy towards raising temples and edifices of public utility. The queen consecrated to the divine Rudra the shrine named Rudreshwara with gold Amalasara. Writes Kalhana: "This shrine is the ornament of Kashmir and the essence of world's beauty. Executed in white stone, gleaming like the nectar-giving moon, it creates the impression, by its loveliness, as if Rudra the remover of the sufferings of poverty, were making the ocean of milk flow even to this day for the thirst of Upamanyu."[29] Until the time of King Jayasimha Queen Didda was celebrated for having founded the greatest number of buildings and towns in Kashmir ; but Kalhanika outstripped her by raising many more edifices and by renovating the old and damaged structures and restoring them to their original grandeur.

28. Ibid., VIII, 3248-3249a.
29. Ibid., VIII, 3389-3391a.

Kalhanika's influence on politics and administration did not suffer diminution till the end of Jayasimha's regime. But justice was her passion and truth her ideal. She was harsh to the guilty and kind to the innocent sufferer. On the one hand, there could be no escape from punishment even for ruling chiefs when she adjudged them responsible for an unlawful deed ; on the other, she was the refuge of the state functionaries when the king was hot with anger for any cause.[30] Not for nothing did the people of Kashmir weep and shed tears of sorrow at the time of her death.

30. Ibid., VIII, 3392s.

CHAPTER FOUR

OTHER NOTABLE CHARACTERS

SO long we have spoken about the queens who either ruled Kashmir in their own right or made themselves famous by taking active and prominent part in the political and social life of the country in their capacity as the partners of the ruling monarchs. But many of them have functioned in other ways too — as regents of minor kings, guardians of princes or members of the cabinet.

It was a well-established practice during the ancient times that when a king died leaving a minor son behind him, the dowager queen was forthwith nominated as regent of the kingdom till the boy came of age. The practice had assumed the sanctity of a sacred tradition which few ministers or grandees had the courage to violate. At the death of King Yashaskara in 948 A. D. his son Sangramadeva was an infant and his mother was either already dead or for some obscure reason she was considered unfit to function as regent. An ambitious and influential minister, Parvagupta, who later on captured power (949—950 A. D.), had an eye on the crown but dared not usurp it because the grandmother of the infant successor was still alive and was traditionally entitled to assume the responsibility of the regent. Parvagupta had to remain content with the position of the prime minister and the grandmother was unanimously acclaimed as the lawful head of the state.[1] In the pages of *Rajatarangini* we frequently come across the names of royal mothers who have admirably conducted affairs of the country during the minority periods of the crowned princes.

Several queens have earned reputation as members of the

1. *Rajatarangini*, VI, 116ff.

cabinets under various monarchs. King Jayapira (746—779 A.D.) conferred the office of High Chamberlain on his talented consort Kalyandevi, an honour and a responsibility which was usually bestowed upon men possessing uncommon ability and power of understanding. It was only after the queen had proved herself capable of comprehending the intricate problems of politics and finance that the gracious monarch nominated her for the high office.

It would be wrong to infer from the afore-mentioned facts that only the ladies of royal birth got the opportunity to unfold their potentialities or were gifted with talents to undertake work of responsibility. It is true that members of the poor classes, the downtrodden and the exploited, took little or no share in public affairs and were mostly deprived of the cultural blessings but there is sufficient evidence to induce us to believe that in ancient Kashmir the class and caste barriers were crumbling down and many women of middling society and some even of the so-called low-birth were slowly emerging to play an increasing part in social and political life. The honours and distinctions of queenship were not exclusively reserved for women of any caste, or class ; girls born in any stratum of society could aspire to rise to high positions in civil and military administration. It will no doubt be foolish to assert that there was any equality among men themselves or of men with women in the sense which this term connotes in the modern times. But all the same we do find that women of mean birth (mean in the eyes of ancients) such as Dombas, Chandalas (untouchables) and spirit-distillers were accepted in wedlock by kings and recognised by the people as lawful queens whose progeny enjoyed the regal status of princes and princesses. King Chakravarman married a Domba girl, King Lalitapida took as his spouse Jayadevi a courtesan and the great Avantivarman was born of a girl whose parents were spirit-distillers.

To become a queen in Kashmir in the ancient times was not only to acquire many rights, privileges and prerogatives ; it afforded innumerable opportunities of public service. We have seen how some of the gifted women utilised these opportunities to the full, mostly for the betterment of their homeland but occasionally also in the cause of evil. It is notable that women who had once acquired the regal status continued to enjoy some sanctity and at least a semblance of the priviliges even after

they had been removed from the throne and turned out of the palace. When Prince Lothana raised the banner of rebellion against King Jayasimha and wanted to wear the crown of Lohara, the local people declined to recognise him as the lawful ruler until he got hold of one Sharda who had been a wife of King Sussala and secured her blessings.[2] "It shows the political importance of Ranis of Kashmir", observes R.S. Pandit. "A forgotten Rani was made use of for the purpose of obtaining her sanction to legalise rebel activity."[3]

Because it opened vast fields of social service and huminitarian work, to become the spouse of a king must have been the highest aspiration of any public-spirited woman. But it is evident that not many of them could realise such an ambition. Very rarely did a monarch choose his bride from outside the ranks of princesses born in some palace. Naturally therefore talented women had to seek other fields and different means to utilise their nature-given gifts. It is about them that we shall speak now.

(a) Military Commanders

The most surprising feats of Kashmir women which elicit our admiration were performed in the ranks of armed forces. We do not know if they were recruited in the infantry or were appointed as officers of lower ranks. But there is no doubt that they have acted as captains of forces, fought on battle-fields at the head of troops, won battles or suffered defeats. Instances of valour and heroism of certain lady soldiers are narrated in the *Rajatarangini*. Mention has already been made of queens who took the command of royal armies in person when occasion demanded that they should do so. The history furnishes names of other women who bore arms and achieved undying fame while fighting valiantly as commanders of big armies. Two of them deserve notice.

1. Silla

King Sussala (1112-1120 A.D. and 1121-1128 A.D.) secured the throne of Kashmir through a successful uprising against Harshadeva who was mercilessly murdered by insurgents. Despite the new monarch's incessant endeavours to exterminate all claimants to the kingdom, Bhikshachara, grandson of the assassinated king escaped alive and challenging Sussala as

2. Ibid., VIII, 1823s.
3. Op. cit., P. 462.

usurper became his formidable foe. The young prince made persistent attempts to regain his ancestral throne and was once, in 1120 A.D., for a short duration even able to capture it. After only six months Sussala regained the kingdom and turned out Bhikshachara but could not annihilate him. So the civil war dragged on and never did the people live calmly during the whole period that Sussala wore the crown. Practically every adult living in the valley was engaged directly or indirectly in warfare either on the side of the king or on that of the insurrectionists. Women also actively participated in the turmoil and fought on the battle-field. Among them was Silla whose stoutheartedness, presence of mind and valour have been praised and recorded in history.

Silla was born in a cultured, wealthy and aristrocratic family. When young she was trained by her father in the art of warfare and was adequately experienced in commanding troops and leading them against an enemy. She had the rank of royal cadet and held a fief in her own right. When Sussala captured power she had passed the middle age and was elderly in appearance but quite alert and energetic in behaviour. Probably she had been among the opponents of Harshadeva and a member of the faction which rebelled against that unfortunate monarch. Her son, Vijaya, was a minister in the government under Sussala. In the civil war she was a staunch supporter of the Royalists and was, despite her advancing age, enlisted for active service.

Civil war undermines the morale of a nation and it becomes difficult to find reliable men. Throughout the period of the internal disturbances we frequently read in the annals about men who were posing as friends of both camps. Sussals had many untrustworthy people at his court and one of these was Mallakoshta. He was a resourceful upstart and a vile intriguer. Coming to know of his base deeds the king consigned him into prison where he pretended to repent and begged for pardon. But after release in the winter of 1122 A.D., the disaffected Mallakoshta, with a view to avenge his disgrace, invited Bhikshachara to invade the valley. Prithvihara another disgruntled courtier of Sussala, had already joined that prince who was busy with making preparations for an attack. Mallakoshta's invitation therefore came at an opportune moment and Bhikshachara lost no time in issuing orders for the march. Getting reports of the impending invasion King Sussala set out to meet Bhikshachara

and to defeat him before he could be upon the capital. One contingent of the enemy forces with which Mallakoshta joined his own troops reached nearer and was stationed at Vijayeshwara (Vijbror). The king decided to pounce upon this army and wipe it out. While engaged in the task he was informed by his couriers that Bhikshachara and Prithvihara had, by another route, proceeded towards Srinagar and were, as a matter of fact, encamped on the western bank of the Kshiptika (Katakuhl). His informants further told the king that the city was in commotion and the people were wavering in their loyalty.

It was a critical moment demanding firm action but Sussala was indecisive not knowing whether he should first vanquish the enemy at Vijayeshwara or return hastily to defend the city. Soon he heard of the defeat of his Commander-in-Chief Sujji on the outskirts of Srinagar and of the plunder of the royal gardens and godowns from which fuel for camp fires and hay for horses had been looted by the soldiers of the enemy. The last courier brought the alarming message that Bhikshachara was about to enter the city and capture it ; absence of the bridge over the Vitasta which had been burned down by the royai guards alone prevented the enemy from doing so. These sombre despatches forced Sussala to reluctantly make a retreat but while the huge royal army on way to Srinagar was crossing a bridge over Gambhira (Ranbiara) it broke down and many soldiers were drowned in the swollen river. The king also fell in the water but somehow he and a small number of armed men, expert swimmers, reached the opposite bank. Most of the troops remained behind and could not cross. Being leaderless they were in panic as the enemy was at their heels to destroy them. Fortunately Silla was also among them as she had, in her enthusiasm, accompanied the king in this military expedition. Unhesitatingly and boldly she took over the command of the forces abandoned by Sussala and arranging them in battle array she faced jubilant Mallakoshta and his blood-thirsty men. Among Silla's forces were, besides military men, Rajputras, councillors, grandees and Damaras ; they mostly belonged to the districts of Vijayeshwara and Devsarsa. The enemy was superior in every respect, in numbers, in arms and in equipment and last but by no means least, in morale.

Nevertheless, encouraged by the undaunted spirit of Silla and her stirring appeals the royal troops displayed marvellous

power of resistance and for many days the fate of the battle remained unpredictable. After the retreat of the king, Mallakoshta took his victory for granted and it excited his laughter to find that Silla was thinking of opposing him. But when the bold lady gave him a tough fight and would show no signs of surrender, Mallakoshta became apprehensive and sent pressing messages to Bhikshachara to despatch forthwith some reinforcements to enable him to overcome Silla. Prithvihara arrived soon at the head of a detatchment and joined Mallakoshta. Still Silla contrived to hold the field and would not budge an inch. But the number of casualities in the royal armies increased. Her Brahman lieutenant Kalyanaraja an expert in military manoeuvres fell. This was an irreparable loss. Silla became desperate yet more daring. One day when she was in the front attacking the enemy and attempting to penetrate into his ranks Prithvihara fatally wounded her. Blood flowed from her body and she began to faint. Her unconquerable spirit declined to give in and even in a state of exhaustion she addressed words of bravery to her troops. But her end had come. Before she could be removed from the field she succumbed to the injuries. It decided the fate of the combatants. The royal armies fled in all directions and were pursued by the insurgents. Nearly a thousand soldiers were captured; Damaras, dignitaries and noblemen were kept as war prisoners; others were either mercilessly killed by impalement or dispersed after torture. To commemorate the victory it was proclaimed on the spot that Silla's fief would be bestowed on Tikka, a rebel leader.

2. Chudda

The despatch of a part of rebel forces under Bhikshachara as succour to Mallakoshta lessened pressure on the capital and King Sussala was able to ward off the disaster for the time being. But, because of the victory which Mallakoshta won over the royal army commanded by Silla, the insurgents were heartened and the civil war spread far and wide. Rebel groups were formed in evory part of the land. Anti-king fever particularly seized the city and the entire region of Madhavrajya (Maraz or South Kashmir) was in its grip. Mallakoshta, flushed with his success, marched with rapid strides towards the capital. Srinagar, surrounded on all sides by insurgents, appeared a doomed city. On its south and west two vigorous attacks were made to reduce it. For want of a bridge on the Vitasta it was

deemed improbable that the rebel soldiers could enter the city from the western side ; therefore preparations were started by the enemy in right earnest to push his way through from the south.

Bhikshachara selected the cream of his fighting men and stationed them on the banks of Mahasarit (modern Tsunti Kuhl). The prospect of a sure victory attracted innumerable able-bodied citizens to his side. Prithvihara is reported to have counted certain equipments of this army. There were 1200 drums and the number of kettle drums was beyond enumeration. From it one can easily imagine the massive strength of the insurgents. It was generally believed that the days of King Sussala were numbered.

At this crucial moment Yasoraja, a valiant fighter who had gone abroad several years before, astonishingly appeared from nowhere leading a big platoon of well-disciplined and adequately equipped soldiers to assist the King Sussala. His sudden appearance on the scene of the battle on the side of the royal armies dismayed the rebels and tipped the scales in favour of the king.

While Sussala was fighting with his back to the wall and defending the city with every ounce of his energy he commanded one Chudda and her son Panch Chandra to proceed to Madhavraja and stop Mallakoshta from advancing further. This was not an easy task to perform. A war veteran, an experinced soldier, a gifted commander and, above all, a thoroughly dependable friend alone could be entrusted with the undertaking.

Chudda had sprung from a family of statesmen-soldiers which had been closely associated with the Royal House of Kashmir. She was handsome, well-built, intelligent and reliable. At the young age of fifteen she was married to Garga Chandra, a courtier wielding immense influence and known as king-maker in Kashmir history. When Sussala ascended the throne in 1112 A.D. Garga Chandra became his prime minister and gave his two daughters, Rajlaxmi and Gunalekha, in marriage respectively to the king and his son, Jayasimha. Partly owing to the intimate relationship but mainly because of their sincere admiration for the king's good qualities, Garga Chandra and his family were passionately devoted to Sussala. But such are the callousness and suspicion born of civil war that without rhyme or reason the king one day suddenly invited the

unsuspecting father-in-law and his son to the palace and ordered immediate execution of both. Chudda was justifiably furious at this wanton cruelty. The robbed lady would not forgive the royal offender and bravely refused to countenance any feelers for reconciliation. But time cooled her off ; the love of her daughters in the palace chastened her ruffled spirits and she was prevailed upon to give in and re-swear her loyalty to the king.

Sussala was aware of the fact that Chudda was not only brave and adept in the art of war but also a lady of honour who, when entrusted with responsibility, would not even think of deserting the king's cause, come what may. That knowledge made him select her in preference to others as the commander of the forces which were despatched to thrust back advancing Mallakoshta and his troops.

Chudda's son Panch Chandra too was a soldier of eminence. He had been trained in the use of arms and was second in command to his mother. No sooner had they been apprised of His Majesty's wish than both collected their own forces and proceeded to meet the insurgents closing in on the city from the south. Mallakoshta was not a warrior whose capacity one could easily despise. The victory at Vijayeshwara had enhanced his fame and added to his prestige. On the other hand, the prestige of the royal forces had waned. But Chudda was not a woman to lose heart; nothing deterred her where the cause of the king was concerned. She was determined either to vanquish the enemy or give her own life on the battle-field fighting against the insurgents.

It is a pity that the historian has not recorded any details of the battles which were fought by Chudda and Mallakoshta. For many days the two armies brought their respective mights into full play to destroy each other. But every day ended without either of the combatants being in a position to claim victory. There were ups and downs in their fortune but on the whole they were equally balanced. Suddenly, one day the insurgents displayed signs of weakness and many of them were terror-stricken. Nothing is known of the methods Chudda employed to overawe the enemy and to defeat the renowned warrior, Mallakoshta. This much, however, has been recorded that when pressed heavily by the royal forces the insurgents started laying down arms and their defeat was in sight. Mallakoshta deserted

the field, fled by tortuous routes from Kashmir and took refuge in the territory of Dards (modern Gilgit and adjoining areas).

The defeated rebel leader was driven to run so far away into a distant land because, in Srinagar, Bhikshachara and his partisans fared no better. With the participation of Yasoraja in the civil war on the side of the king the insurgents were so scared that, in fear, they left the battle-field and went up the Gopa Hill (the Shankaracharya) to save their lives. But the royal armies chased them and killed as many of the wretched lot as they could lay their hands upon.

The rebellion was quelled and the situation brought under control. Sussala could once again heave a sigh of relief.

On return to the capital victorious Chudda and her son Panch Chandra were accorded a grand reception befetting the performers of golden deeds. They were popularly acclaimed as defenders of the motherland and protectors of the people. Sussala was so overjoyed with the success that, in recognition of their loyal services, he gratefully conferred the joint governorship of Lohara on the heroic mother and the brave son. Chudda's exploits were sung by the royal bards in the palace and roving ministrels far and wide in the land.

But the insurgents were only suppressed and not extirpated. The fire of revenge generated by the defeat and humiliation was burning brightly in their hearts. Mallakoshta chafed under the mortification born of discomfiture. Stealthily, he started negotiations with Prithvihara who was living incognito in some corner of the valley. Other ring-leaders of the rebel groups were contacted and consulted. A new conspiracy to rise afresh against Sussala was hatched and plans were formulated to start operations. But Mallakoshta was so afraid of Chudda and her prowess that he candidly declined to come personally so long as she was alive and in occupation of Lohara fortress. Thereupon, it was resolved that the redoubtable lady should be assassinated through some foul play before the banner of rebellion was openly unfurled.

In the month of Pausha (December—January) Chuddda accompained by her retinue came to Devasarsa to pay a visit to some of her friends. Taking advantage of the opportunity Prithvihara employed a natorious ruffain, Tikka—who had murdered his own mother—and despatched him from the village Suvarna Sanura to Devasarsa to perform the sordid act. One day when Chudda

was walking, unescorted and without arms, on the road Tikka attacked her from behind and she was seriously wounded. Even in the clutches of death she displayed the virtues of a soldier. She turned round and grappled with the assassin and would not relax her hold until flow of blood exhausted her. Unarmed and alone, she could not stand for long and fell under the heavy weight of a murderous weapon.[4]

The dastardly deed gladdened the hearts of the insurgents who now took courage to come out of the places of hiding. Mallakoshta too returned from Dardistan. The report of Chudda's murder profoundly shocked King Sussala ; it dealt a blow at the stability of his administration and it put fresh vigour in the drooping spirits of the rebels. A new wave of disturbances spread in the country. We are not, however, interested in the subsequent political developments for that is beyond the scope of this work.

Gloom descended upon the kingdom at the gruesome murder of the respected lady. What lent intense poignancy to the incident was that the local people, cowardly enough, were frightened by the terrorist deed of the mean insurgents and saw their safety in running away from their homes. Says Kalhana: "Chudda had triumphed over the malcontents with her own and the royal forces ; Tikka having made a surprise attack on her killed her in battle. This impious man committed a second brutal murder of a woman ; what difference, however, is there between beasts, Malechhas, bandits and demons ? While one of the weaker sex, their leigelady, was being murdered, the people of Lohara, like cattle, took to flight; it was a wonder they took up arms subsequently."[5]

(b) Danseuses

The Kashmiri patriot Bilhana who achieved undying fame as poet-laureate at the court of Kalyan (Deccan) in the 11th century A.D. tells us in the last canto of his widely read poem, *Vikramankadevacharita*, while describing his homeland that women of Kashmir in his time spoke Sanskrit fluently. He does not mention any lady litterateur by name but speaks of them generally which shows that education was not confined to any class or section of women but was spread among a large number

4. Op. cit., VIII, 1136-1137s.
5. Op. cit., VIII, 1138-1139s.

of them though it is certain that it could not be common. None of the books which might have been written by Kashmiri women during the ancient times has survived. It is not certain if at all any such composition saw the light of the day. But if we consider the extent of intellectual freedom that women enjoyed and the active part they played in all spheres of social life there is sufficient reason to believe that their cultured minds and fertile brains could not have attained contentment without producing books containing their thoughts, ideas and observations. The number of books by ancient Kashmiri authors was appreciably large ; only a fraction has come down to us. The hands of vandals no less than the rigours of Nature have been at work in the long intervening period to wipe out hundreds of the literary productions some of which were undoubtedly of merit. It would not be surprising if among those that were destroyed a few were the fruits of the creative genius of women. In any case, however, not many women could have flourished as authors and sprouted as poets.

If we know little about the achievements of Kashmir women in the realm of literature, we possess ample historical data to form our opinion of their progress in the fine arts of singing, dancing and music. From the earliest days historians have recorded the nature and extent of this progress.

As in other parts of India, women singers called devadasis were attached to temples in Kashmir and no reputable shrine was considered fully equipped with the requisite instruments of worship unless it had on its staff a few of the singing girls for the spiritual benefit alike of the gods and the pilgrims. Then there were professional songstresses and dancing girls who entertained the princes and wealthy classes in private halls or at public places reserved for the purpose. Grandees, nobles and dignitaries patronised these danseuses and in certain cases paid them regular salaries to enable them to pursue the art without worry of earning their livelihood. Artistes were not looked down upon as belonging to mean occupation unless they had association with some other profession carrying a stigma and reflecting on their character. Dancing girls and songstresses were highly esteemed in society and recognised as persons possessing merit.

Nor was dancing and singing confined to professionals ; both were commonly practised in respectable families. Many princes

and princesses are praised for having been connoisseurs of the gentle arts and for having popularised them. It was deemed a great honour by even kings to personally teach these arts to girls of royal blood and then dedicate them to the sacred cause. King Jalauka presented to the temple of Jeshtarudra a hundred ladies of the royal household who used to get up early and worship the deity.[6] Because of the deep interest that kings and courtiers evinced in dancing and singing the women artistes were closely associated with politics and some of them exerted perceptible influence on the policy of the government. "The courtesan in Kashmir", writes R.S. Pandit "played a part similar to that of Haetera in old Greece."[7]

A strange story is told by Kalhana ; how king Lalitaditya unearthed two ancient temples in a jungle far away from human habitation. It is said that two sisters belonging to a family of professional singers and dancers were heard for days bewitchingly chanting hymns on a particular mound in the thick woods where the king had been hunting. On being questioned the girls told Lalitaditya that they sang because it was a custom held sacred by their family and that the custom had come down to them through generations. The king pondered, then ordered to start digging at the place and lo ! two ancient temples were excavated. The forbears of the songstresses were attached to the temples as devadasis, hence the family tradition.[8]

The taste for operatic songs and appreciation of the ballet of dancing girls such as were comme il faut in other lands were introduced in Kashmir by King Ananta. His queen, Sahaja, was before her marriage a resident dancing girl of a temple who, having been seen on the stage, fascinated the prince by her exquisite dances and enthralling music. Anantadeva atonce accepted her as his consort and brought her into his palace. When the much maligned king committed suicide in 1089 A.D., Sahaja was so overpowered by grief that she entered the funeral pyre and burnt herself to death along with the dead body of her lover.

King Harsha's penchant for arts and learning was celebrated alike by his blind admirers and sworn enemies. His love for men and women of merit was unbounded. He used to personally

6. Op. cit., I, 151s.
7. Op, cit., P. 22.
8. Op. cit., IV, 265-274.

instruct dancing girls in reserved apartments in his palace which were illuminated by bright lamps and the king would spend whole nights over the work. Scores of talented and fair-complexioned girls delighted the king with feasts of songs, music and dance. For days and weeks on, Harshadeva forgot himself and the responsibilities of politics and government while he was absorbed in *soirees* and carousals. It was the over-indulgence and close intimacy with girls that contributed to the downfall of the soft-hearted king. The pleasure-givers interfered in his administration and spied for the benefit of his adversaries. Two brothers of royal blood, Uchchla and Sussala, conspired to overthrow Harshadeva's government and with that objective in view spread disaffection among the people. The king after having consultations with his trusted councillors contemplated the assassination of the conspirators. Thakkana, a dancing girl in the good books of Harsha, got scent of the king's plans and immediately warned the two princes with whom also she was on intimate terms. Not long afterwards, Harsha met his doom and Uchchla ascended the throne.

Describing the currents and cross-currents of politics during his own times when civil war was in full swing and insurrections were the order of the day, Kalhana tells us that there are certain groups and sections of people who are by nature enemies of the king, opposed to stable government and lovers of upheavals. Among such perverse Kashmiris the historian includes the superannuated dancing girls of the temples[9] which shows that these women must have been taking keen interest and active part in state politics of the time.

Mention has been made of certain monarchs of Kashmir who accepted dancing girls as their wives. King Jayapira (746-779 A. D.) married Kamala a professional dancer whom he met for the first time in strange circumstances while he was roaming about incognito and alone. But of all such rulers who made artistes as their queens the case of Chakravarman (922-932 A.D. and 934-936 A.D.) is perhaps the most interesting.

One day a certain Domba vocalist named Ranga arrived at the lion-gate of the palace and prayed that he be presented before the king. The artiste was not unknown though unheard at the court and his presence was welcomed on all sides when the king desired to ascertain the wishes of his sycophants and

9. Op. cit., VIII, 706-710a.

parasites. Because Ranga was an untouchable, King Chakravarman granted him an audience in the outer hall of the Assembly Chamber. The vocalist was accompanied by his two daughters Hamsi and Naglatta with pellucid eyes and musical throats. The king commanded Ranga and both the girls to give a performance of their singing. All the courtiers gleaming with white turbans were present in the hall which was birlliantly illuminated with glittering lamps. The princes and princesses were no less eager to hear the vocalist and his gifted daughters. "The rows of windows beamed with faces, fragrant with wine, of the gazelle-eyed ladies of the royal household who were curious to watch the musical performance", says Kalhana.[10]

The Domba artiste followed by his troupe decked in necklaces, wristlets, armlets, bracelets and other trinkets made his graceful entry. Bending down with correct ceremony and rising up when the choristers had produced andante, the musical note of the special *Raga*, the song of the two girls as they sang expanded in one melodious note in harmony, its symphony being heightened by a gentle tremor of the head and the movement of the brows and the eyes. Chakravarman was enraptured. He ceased to chew the *tambula* and became motionless in figure. With unmoving eyelids and through joy he appeared like an entelope. The change in the king's bodily expression was not lost on the enchantresses. They sang more tenderly and made greater appeals to him through smiling faces, graceful bows and amorous movements. The heart of Chakravarman was captivated and when the troupe left the palace he felt restless in mind. Feeling out of sorts he, every now and then, commanded Ranga and his daughters to adorn the palace by their presence and repeat the musical performances. The more he heard the songs and enjoyed the dances the greater became his passion for the girls and soon he could not live for a moment in their absence. The laws and customs governing dealings with untouchables were infringed and private audiences in inner apartments were arranged where the king could more freely meet the object of his passion. "The girls while singing by the side of the bed," says Kalhana, "by slow degrees accorded him kisses and introduced him irresistibly to the joys of love."[11] Finally, Chakravarman could stand it no more and succumbed. He took

10. Op. cit.. V, 385s.
11. Op. cit., V, 384s.

Hamsi, the greater enchantress of the two singing girls, into his wedlock and made her his premier queen who enjoyed the privilege among the royal ladies of being fanned with the yak-tail. Mourns Kalhana : "Those who had eaten of the leavings of her plate were councillors at the court of Chakravarman and of subsequent kings as well."[12]

The meteoric rise to power did not make Hamsi vain or haughty. Besides being a bewitching artiste she now proved herself worthy of the windfall in her life. Though born of untouchable parents she exercised the royal prerogatives and queenly privileges in a sensible way. Before long she learnt to behave in a manner as befitted a king's spouse and soon commanded the respect of the courtiers and the people. Having in this way earned her right to the queenship by debonair behaviour which might have been denied to her because of her birth, Hamsi went on a state visit to the principle *tirthas*, shrines and other places of religious importance. "When she proceeded to visit Ranaswamin on the day of Tiladvadashi, she was followed by all feudatories except proud Damaras" states Kalhana.[13]

(c) Diplomats

Ancient Kashmir has produced a crop of women diplomats. We know their names but no details of the work done by any of them have been preserved. Queen Kalhanika's mission may be taken as a measure of the task which such functionaries undertook during the different regimes. While discussing more known personalities passing references have already been made to several ladies engaged in adventures of diplomatic nature. Names of many more can be mentioned but as not much is known of their particular missions it will serve no useful purpose to do so. It would not however be fair to leave the case of nurse Nona unnoticed.

When Prince Bhoja was threatening to invade Kashmir from the North with the help of the ruler of Dardistan he had in his camp an elderly woman, Nona. Bhoja's father having died while the prince was in his infancy and the mother having followed the husband in death, he was brought up by this worthy woman who had stood in the mother's stead to him. The prince had great regard verging on reverence for the good nurse

12. Op. cit., V, 388s.
13. Op. cit., V, 395s.

in his mind. Nona was soft-spoken trustworthy and worldly-wise besides being affectionate and selfless. She possessed the qualities which go to make a successful negotiator and had proved a helping hand to Bhoja when he needed the services of a mediator to solve tricky problems between himself and his allies. It was therefore but natural that when the prince finally resolved to end hostility against King Jayasimha and make friends with him, he should think of despatching Nona on the mission.

We do not know what took place between Jayasimha and Nona when she delivered Bhoja's missive at the king's court. No records of the talk have been preserved nor can it be definitely stated if any one else of the prince's confidents accompanied her on the important and historic errand. But it is beyond doubt that she was eminently successful in accomplishing the task which had been entrusted to her. Jayasimha did not hesitate to recognise Nona as Bhoja's plenipotentiary or to open negotiations when the talks held with her had borne fruit. For it was immediately after the return of the lady diplomat to Bhoja's camp that the king sent Queen Kalhanika to Taramulaka to get the agreement confirmed and conduct the prince with due honour into the royal presence.

(d) Religious Leaders

The indigenous religious philosophy known as Shaivism or the Trika Shastra (Science of the Triple) was evolved by the seers and scholars of Kashmir to end the tussle between Brahmanism and Buddhism. It is a splendid production of creative thinking. By fusion of the ancient six systems of Hindu philosophy and agnostic doctrines of Buddhism, the genius of Kashmir savants gave a new religion to the world which fulfilled the spiritual needs of the contemporary society and has been a solace to innumerable restless spirits in the modern world. What share the intelligent Kashmiri women had in this noble endeavour it is difficult to say. But the fact that great stress has been laid in several important treatises on the Trika Shastra to provide equal opportunities to women as to men for the realisation of the ultimate goal is worthy of attention; it is a sufficient indication that the fair sex had attained a high status in social life and women were not much inferior to men when the philosophy was born in the 9th century A.D. or even earlier. For

religious and spiritual life is but a reflection of the socio-economic condition of society and where women are allowed equality with men in spiritual sphere they can not be treated as inferiors in mundane affairs.

Abhinavagupta, the versatile Shaiva philosopher, whose monumental works are still extant, has authoritatively stated that "a man must have a woman as messanger" for communion with the All Powerful "who must be treated as one's equal and with honour", otherwise the man forfeits his right to perform the religious ceremonies or rituals laid down by Shaiva preceptors.[14] The renowned philosopher was of the opinion that "a woman devoted to the principles of the Trika will succeed in achieving the same *siddhi* in twelve days as will take men, if they have the least fear in their hearts, twelve long months.[15] The woman was not only equal but a little superior in certain respects and under specified conditions. Nor may we suppose that this was a concession allowed in theory but denied in practice. For Kashmiri women are known to have actively participated in religious observances in the household of Brahmans if not in those of other high castes. We read in the *Rajatarangini* how matrons presided as divinities at *gurudiksha* to the annoyance of anti-progressive and intolerant sections of the people.[16] Gurudiksha is a tantric ceremony observed for the initiation of a *guru* or religious preceptor. Women, equally with men, could become *gurus*, and, after the initiation ceremony, could as a matter of right receive worship from their disciples who coupled their names with that of the deity.[17] This institution was in existence upto the 10th century A.D. and was so prevalent in the reign of King Yashaskara that the illiberal Brahmans, afraid of the dominance af womenfolk, vigorously opposed it and probably approached the king with a pressing demand to stop it. For we are told that Yashaskara, himself a Brahman of narrow views, deprived women, by a royal fiat, of the age-old privilege during the days of his rule.[18]

In spreading religious movements, in defending the freedom of worship, in safeguarding the right of proselytisation and in

14. Quoted in *Kashmir Shaivism.*
15. Ibid.
16. Op. cit. VI, 12s.
17. *River of Kings,* P. 195 f.n.
18. Op. cit. VI, 12s.

protecting their co-religionists from the tyranny of hostile governments, the women of Kashmir have worked as zealously in earlier ages as during the medieval period. The names of many such ladies have been mentioned by writers and historians but, alas again, no reliable record of their achievements has been preserved. Kalhana has, however, related the fascinating story of a Buddhist heroine who bravely represented the grievances of her community to the king and, through sheer force of argument and profundity of convictions, got them redressed.

The message and doctrine of the Buddha reached the valley when it was annexed by Ashoka to his vast Indian empire, if not earlier. Partly due to unstinted support that the Kashmir intellectuals gave to it but mainly because of the patronage it received from the ruling power, the new faith spread rapidly throughout the land to the consternation and dismay of the obscurant and ritual-ridden Brahmans. So long as the Buddhist Emperor lived and held sway over the country, the reactionary Brahmans had to dwell in their necessity and lie low but when Jalauka ascended the throne counter-revolution reared its vicious head and heavy blows were dealt at the egalitarian order introduced by Buddhism. Jalauka's ancestry is shrouded in obscurity. Kalhana states that he was a son of Ashoka but other historians do not agree with him. Probably he was a scion of a former royal dynasty of Kashmir who captured power and declared its independence at the death of Ashoka and the disintegration of his empire. At the time of his ascension, Jalauka was hostile to the Buddhist faith and a staunch believer in the Vedic religion. His spiritual advisers were orthodox Brahmans who had defeated some Buddhist scholars in a public debate. The small incident of their victory sharply turned the course of events and abruptly thwarted further progress of the new religion. The Brahmans seizing the opportunity influenced the king to restore the ancient indigenous faith to its old grandeur and to popularise it by all means at his command. Worse still, Jalauka was successfully persuaded and egged on to annihilate the heretic doctrine along with its followers and adherents by a firm policy of suppression and oppression. A ruthless campaign of persecution was launched under the guidance of the king ; innumerable viharas, chaityas and tombs of monks and nuns were demolished ; Buddhist preaches were either slain or forced to go underground ; mass conversions were held and people

were reclaimed in the fold of Brahmanism. It was a reign of terror for the innocent and non-violent Buddhist community.

As in every age, clime and community, there existed dauntless spirits among the Kashmir Buddhists in the frightful dark period. They included both men and women *arhatas*. In utter disregard of personal safety and at a grave peril, they met and formed an association called *Krityakas* (Powers of Darkness) with the object of destroying the forces of ignorance, prejudice and bigotry which had brought about the ruin of Buddhism and the miseries of the Buddhists in the beautiful land. The Krityakas chose Krityadevi, a courageous member of their body, to seek audience of the king and plead the cause of the suppressed community before him. She was quite old, frail, and rickety but possessed a firm and perspicacious mind as also the great power of advocacy.

By nature Jalauka was neither intolerant nor closed-minded. Despite his connivance and even approval to the policy of persecution, his attitude towards liberalisation of the administration was such as would have done credit to any progressive monarch of the age. He introduced far-reaching reforms in the administration and set up, for the first time in Kashmir a constitutional government to bring the state into line with the advanced parts of India. This raised great hopes in the minds of the victimised Buddhists and the Krityakas rightly surmised that if they could efficiently and intelligently represent their case to the enlightened monarch their days of agony might end.

Finding a suitable opportunity to meet Jalauka without his Brahman advisers around him, the bold Krityadevi, assuming the garb of a beggar-woman, stood in the middle of the road when the king was on his way to the sacred shrine of Vijayeshwara. Questioned to state what she wanted, the supplicant begged for food. Jalauka, reputed for his munificence and generosity of heart, promised to give her what she desired. Thereupon, Krityadevi assumed a hideous form and asked for human flesh. Jalauka was a votary of the cult of non-violence and scrupulously abstained from killing living beings however low in order of creation. He was therefore taken aback at the unusual and unexpected demand of Krityadevi. But, true to his plighted word, he granted her permission to have the flesh, if she must, from different limbs of his body. To prepare himself for the severe ordeal which

faced him, the king concentrated all his mental, moral and spiritual energies and was undergoing an intense mystic experience. The shrewd Krityadevi knew the opportune moment had arrived when she could appeal to the finer emotions and higher-self of Jalauka. Disclosing her identity, she narrated the story of the long-drawn sufferings and intolerable hardships of the Buddhist community. While doing so, she did not forget to expound the lofty ideals and profound truths taught by the heretic faith. Krityadevi revealed that Jalauka was a Bodhisattva as his abiding love for all living creatures proved and, had not the wicked councillors inflamed his mind, he could never have thought of harming the Buddhists or demolishing their shrines and other edifices. It is said that the Buddhist nun's oration deeply impressed the king and his eyes were opened to the wrongs that had been done. He felt remorseful and vowed to rebuild viharas and to allow complete liberty to every man and woman in his kingdom to preach what he or she believed in and practice what he or she thought best.

The joy of Krityadevi knew no bounds. Profusely blessing Jalauka for the re-orientation of his policy towards Buddhists, she hastily went away to convey the tidings of the outcome of the interview to other Krityakas. There were universal jubilations in the suppressed community; a new era of progress had dawned. Never after this incident did the Brahmans or any government official dare persecute the Buddhists so long as Jalauka was on the throne; demolition of religious buildings was strictly forbidden. The king was thereafter kind, generous and sympathetic. Indeed, Kalhana says that Jalauka built a vihara named Krityashrama (modern Kichahom) to redeem his pledge and, what is more, found at the spot where he had met Krityadevi an image of the old lady to commemorate the event and perpetuate her memory.[19] The Krityashrama was in existence till the days of Kshemendra (eleventh century A.D.). In his well known work, *Samayamatrika*, the versatile poet makes the artiste Kankali spend sometime in it in the course of her rakish progress through the length and breadth of the valley.

Krityadev, was not an uncommon figure in ancient Kashmir. She was one of the numerous Buddhist nuns who worked in the valley for the propagation and preservation of the heretic faith during the early centuries of the Christian Era.

19. Op. cit., I, 147s.

(e) Builders

Construction of structures of any public utility has been a passion of not only the kings and queens but also of wealthy individuals known or obscure, high or low, who were anxious to gain religious merit or to achieve lasting fame. It depended on the size of the purse as to which edifice a donor would select to build but no ambitious man or woman would have liked to die until he or she had raised in his or her lifetime a temple, a convent, a vihara, a hospital, a hospice, a school, an aqueduct, a tank or a *dharamshala*. A king or a queen considered life worthless if no building work of social significance was undertaken and completed in the days of his or her rule. That was also the view held by ministers, distinguished nobles, big merchants and feudal lords. It was for this reason that the Kashmir Valley was dotted with all varieties of public edifices—temples, viharas, convents and shrines—which enhanced the sacredness of the land of Kashyapa.

As in other spheres of social life, women had also their adequate share in the building activities in almost every regime in ancient times. Severity of Nature and the cruel hands of vain fanatics and religious zealots have conspired together during the past five thousand years or so to destroy almost the entire architectural wealth; we are deprived of the enjoyment of witnessing edifices a good number of which, judging by all recorded accounts and by the ruins that have survived, must have been magnificent, massive and noble.

In this narrative we have already referred to the constructions raised and the foundations laid by certain queens and other women during their sunny days when they had sufficient leisure to encourage the arts and architecture. In doing so, we have by no means exhausted the list of women builders. There have been queens and other notable ladies who were little attracted to politics or administration but were deeply interested in serving humanity and their homeland by spending all they could save in raising structures of common usefulness. We may take a brief notice of these benefactresses.

1. Amritaprabha, seniormost queen of King Meghvahana (1-35 A.D.) caused a lofty vihara to be built for the use of Buddhist bhikshus. It was known as Amritbhavana (modern Vantabhavana).[20]

20. Op. cit., III, 9s

2. Yukadevi, Meghvahana's another queen, bent on emulating Amritaprabha, built a vihara of marvellous proportions in Nadavana. One half portion of the vihara was reserved for those bhikshus who strictly followed the laws and injunctions laid down in Buddhist scriptures for the guidance of the religious order ; the second half was occupied by the meaner classes of the bhikshus who led the lives of house-holders and possessed wives, children and cattle.[21]

3. Yet another wife of Meghvahana, Indradevi, built Indradevibhavana and a vihara with a guadrangle and a stupa.[22]

This king's other queens named Khadana and Samma too founded magnificent viharas called after their names.[23]

4. Ranarambha was the beloved queen of King Ranaditya (436-497 A.D.) who doted on her and could hardly believe that they were two different souls. They jointly built two massive temples named Ranarambhswamin and Ranarambhdeva. They also constructed a convent on the crest of the sacred Pradyumna (Hari Parbat hillock) for the benefit of the Pashupatas, an order of learned hermits, to enable them to carry on their scholarly and intellectual discourses unperturbed at a calm and tranquil spot.[24]

5. Bimba, the red-lipped handsome queen of Baladitya (582-617 A.D.) founded Bimbeshwara in Aritotsadana.[25]

6. King Durlabhaka (635-685 A.D.) known also as Pratapaditya II had, at first sight, fallen in love with a married Banya woman. She had to be divorced by her broad-minded husband to satisfy the burning, but by no means edifying, passion of the infatuated king. The name of the divorcee is not definitely known ; perhaps it was Narendradevi. After she became the queen she spent her wealth on the construction of a huge structure dedicated to Shiva which was called Sri Narendreshvara.[26]

7. Prakashadevi, the queen of King Chandrapira (685-693 A.D.) built Prakasha Vihara.[27]

8. Historians are agreed that King Lalitaditya Muktapira (697-734 A.D.) was the greatest builder of temples and edifices in the ancient times. He had the irresistible passion to found

21. Op. cit., III, 11s.
22. Op. cit., III, 13s.
23. Op. cit., III, 14s.
24. Op. cit., III, 460s
25. Op. cit., III, 482s
26. Op. cit., IV, 38s.
27. Op. cit., IV, 79s

towns or at least to raise structures of some kind not only in different parts of his kingdom but also wherever he went on expeditions of conquest. His temple didicated to the sun-god on the highland near Mattan commanding the picturesque view of the valley the magnificent ruins of which are still extant, has been adjudged by competent critics as the best specimen of architecture combining elegence, beauty and strength and in no way inferior to the Roman and Grecian architecture.[28] By examining closely the ruins, one gets a fair idea of the other edifices which the great monarch had built and of which historians have spoken in eulogistic terms but are now, alas, no more in existence. It was but natural that, inspired by the unceasing building activity of the king, his queens and ministers too should bend their energies in this direction. Writes Kalhana : "By the ladies of the royal household, the councillors and the rajahs who were in his service, hundreds of sacred foundations were made which were the marvel of the world".[29] The historian has not recorded any description of these foundations beyond stating that the king's consort Kamlavati got a large size silver image of Kamlakeshava to be made and lodged in an edifice called Kamalahatta.[30] Another queen of Lilitaditya, Ishandevi, constructed a big pond full of limpid water like nectar-juice and restorative of health for invalids.[31]

King Jayapira (746-779 A D.) had two wives. Kalyandevi and Kamladevi. It has been stated before that the king, having come to know of the capabilities of Kalyandevi and convinced of the firmness of her mind, appointed her to the exalted office of High Chamberlain. She founded Kalyanpura, a big town, in her own name. The other queen, too, not to be outdone at least in this respect, founded Kamlapura. The king's mother, Amritaprabha, built the temple of Amritakeshava so that, in the words of the historian, the king who had died doing sinful acts may achieve salvation after death.[32]

King Lalitapira (779-791 A.D.) had been bewitched by the looks of a handsome, graceful and well-proportioned girl of

28. Sir Francis Younghusband, in *Kashmir* (A. & C. Black Ltd., London, 1917) pp. 60,85,114 and G. T. Vigne in *Travels in Kashmir* (Henry Colburn, London, 1842) Vol. I, p. 404.

29. Op. cit., IV, 207s.

30. Op. cit., IV, 208s.

31. Op. cit., IV, 212s.

32. Op. cit., IV, 569s.

a spirit-distillers family named Jayadevi. The marriage hastened his death but not before a son was born by the union. In due course of time the infant, Chippata Jayapira, ascended the throne and his mother founded a temple named Jayeshvara.[33]

In the reign of Ajitapira (810-847 A.D.) the wife of Padma, a wealthy and influential courtier, named Gunadevi built one *matha* in Srinagar and another at Vijayeshwara.[34]

Kavyadevi wife of Shura, the Prime Minister of Avantivarman (855-883 A.D.) constructed a temple dedicated to Sadashiva at Sureshwari and named it Kavyadevishvara.[35]

The sweetheart of King Partha (905-916 A.D. and 933-934 A.D.) the courtesan, Sambhavati, who achieved notoriety for her political intrigues and has been celebrated for her foresight and dexterity in controlling the perfidious league of Tantrins, founded the temple of Sambheshvara.[36]

The works of the senior queen of Sangramaraja (1003-1028 A.D.) have been described earlier in this book. The monarch had another queen by the name of Tillotama and a daughter calld Lothika, by her. The queen had passed away during the lifetime of the king. The princess-royal built a monstery in the name of her mother and a convent, Lothika, after her own name.[37]

The edifices built by the senior queens of King Jayasimha (1128-1154 A.D.) have been mentioned. The king had several junior queens who took no part in politics and did not have anything to do with the public administration. One of these, Ratnadevi, utilised her creative faculties in building public structures. She constructed a vihara which ranked first in eminence among the foundations of the time.[38] She built Vaikuntha Convent and severl other sacred buildings on the extensive grounds of the vihara. She erected a *gokula* which eclipsed similar edifices of other countries ; vast grazing grounds for cows were attached to the gokula; a statue of noble bearing and marvellous beauty of Vishnu (Krishna) holding up mount Govardhana was erected in the premises. A temple built by the queen for "Conqueror of Death" whitened by stucco was simply brilliant. She founded two towns, one in Kashmir named Ratnapura, a flourishing place

33. Op. cit., IV, 681s.
34. Op. cit., IV, 696s.
35. Op. cit., V, 41s.
36. Op. cit., V, 296s.
37. Op. cit., VII, 120s.
38. Op cit., VIII, 2402s.

with many gates, and another also after her own name in Darvabhishara (modern Bhimber). In both the towns and at other places too, she founded convents. She created various benefices in memory of loyal servants the chief of whom was her good-natured chamberlain. Ratnadevi did not rob the royal coffers for her building works but spent all the money on them out of her treasury. It is stated that she planned, supervised and executed the works herself and devoted her leisure entirely to the noble engagement.[39]

In King Jayasimha's reign, Sussala, wife of Minister Rilhana, rebuilt the vihara of Ashoka which had been reduced to a condition when it survived only in name. She added a stone temple, residential quarters and other structures to it. By building hostels for students, wells for travellers, water-wheels for the needy public and like constructions, the good lady achieved enviable glory and fame; her works were celebrated for their charitable uses. Kalhana who writes as a personal witness, being a contemporary, observes that Srinagar itself was beautified by the grandeur of the renovated vihara which occupied the entire elevated site on which stood the palace of a former royal dynasty.[40] Sussala was afflicted with the fell disease of pthisis early in her life. She had an unquenchable desire to build mansions and structures for the use of mendicants, students, scholars, ascetics, travellers and the destitutes. The wasting disease soon claimed her but not before she had completed the renovation of Ashoka's vihara and the huge construction of the temple.

Another lady Chinta, wife of Commander-in-chief Udaya, erected a vihara with five chapels at the strand of the Vitasta. In the words of the historian it seemed to be the manifestation of the Law holding up its hand with the firm straight fingers pointing towards heaven.[41]

39. Op. cit., VIII, 2433—2441s.
40. Op. cit., VIII, 2415—2418s.
41. Op. cit., VIII, 3352—3353s.

CHAPTER FIVE

LALLA : HARBINGER OF NEW AGE

NOWHERE else in the subcontinent of India did the Muslims seize political power so easily and peacefully as in Kashmir. When in 1339 A.D., Shah Mir, known to history as King Shams-ud-din, deposed Kotadevi and usurped the throne, it was not one of the common events of a resourceful person ousting a weakling as was frequently witnessed by the people of that age. The coming to power of a man whose religion and culture were different from and, in certain respects, opposed to the prevalent thoughts, traditions and customs of the Kashmiris touched off a revolution the far-reaching consequences of which soon convulsed the whole country to its depths.

In the middle of the fourteenth century Islam was not entirely unknown to the Kashmiris. For more than three centuries before the fateful year 1339 A.D. Hindu kings had been recruiting Muslims from outside as soldiers and officers in their armed forces. The foreign mercenaries proved more hardy, tough and dependable as fighters than the indigenous youth whose physical fitness, devotion to duty and integrity had been undermined by a long-drawn civil war. King Harshadeva is said to have preferred the Muslims and appointed them as centurions in his army who were loyal and fought battles for him. During the short rule of King Rinchana (1320-1323 A.D.)—after he was slighted by short-sighted Brahmans and forced to embrace Islam—nearly ten thousand Kashmiris followed him into the fold. Thus the people were fairly acquainted with the cardinal principles of Islam, its culture and traditions, as well as the customs and observances of the Muslims. But few of them appear to have foreseen the implications of the Muslim rule.

Muslims were treated as equals and indeed with generosity due to the traditional tolerance of the Hindu kings and their courtiers. No notice was taken of the conversions beyond imposing certain restrictions on the converts in the domain of religion ; so far as their political, economic and other rights were concerned the Muslims were on par with and in every respect equal to the Hindus. So long as the Hindu rule lasted, Muslim saints and preachers, if and when any of them visited the valley, enjoyed the liberty to proselytise and spread the Faith unchecked and unobstructed. The conversion of Rinchana at the initiation of Bulbul Shah was accepted without demur if not lustily welcomed and hailed. But when the Muslim rule came to stay matters assumed a different shape. The new creed began to be taken seriously by the orthodox Brahmans no less than by the upper classes among the Hindus when inevitable consequences followed and gradually they were deprived of power. To stabilize their rule the successors of Shah Mir increasingly encouraged adoption of the new faith by their Hindu subjects. For political reasons it was necessary to do so. Unless and until a substantial section of the Kashmiris was converted to Islam no Muslim monarch could feel safe on the throne. Missionaries of the holy faith were invited from other countries. It so happened that, scared by the persecution of Tamerlane, hundreds of Sayids under the leadership of Mir Syed Ali Hamadani left their native lands in Iran to take refuge in Kashmir. They were welcomed and accorded royal reception on arrival. Here we are not concerned with the political consequences of the influx of these zealous propagandists but its tremendous effect on the national thought can not but be of deep interest to any serious student of Kashmir history.

Driven out of their mother country, the Sayids wanted to make the valley as their home of adoption. Naturally they cherished the desire to see Muslim rule firmly established on the soil sacred in the eyes of the non-Muslims. From the day of their arrival in the haven of peace the Muslim missionaries vigorously devoted themselves to the work of proselytisation. The sultan was their chief patron, the might of the state was at their back and the receptive mind of the local population was the guarantee of their success. Situated geographically as it is, Kashmir with its superb climate and scenic beauties, has been the meeting ground of various philosophies, creeds and religions. Its people

have ever kept their minds open to receive new truths and enrich the store-house of their national culture. It is therefore hardly surprising that the Muslim preachers were received with friendly feelings by Kashmiris of all classes and their sermons were heard with reverence and rapt attention.

Nevertheless, the spread of Islam caused an acute mental agitation and intellectual commotion. Die-hard, orthodox and obscurantist Brahmans were shocked to find that their cherished beliefs and ancient rituals were challenged and declared irreligious and immoral. Even before their eyes thousands upon thousands of their compatriots were forsaking the dharma of their fore-fathers and voluntarily embracing the new religion. Something was to be done to stem the onrushing tide which seemed to sweep everything that came in its path; the masses were to be saved from being engulfed. The appalled Brahmans girded up their loins to fight defensive battles as steadfastly as the Sayids were determined to popularise the revolutionary creed of Islam. Inevitably an ideological conflict ensued which dragged on for many decades.

The warfare of ideas and ideals in which the people of Kashmir were involved in the fourteenth century was no ordinary one ; it was a gigantic clash of two great cultures of the world. Islam and Brahmanism were in grips with each other; the impact on the common mind was terrific ; it was quite difficult for the average man to decide what was true and what was untrue if and when he was allowed to make a choice for himself. He was simply bewildered and dazed.

The stability of the administration and the progress of the country no less than the advancement of the culture made it imperative that the people should emerge successfully from the state of stupefaction ; the ideological struggle must be resolved; the spiritual crisis must end. It could be done only by the fusion of the two cultures. Both exotic Islam and indigenous Brahmanism had their respective merits and demerits but their was also much in common between the two. Wisdom consisted in retaining all that was abiding and lofty in both and in discarding what would disharmonise with the cultural traditions and the spirit of advancement. The sooner this fusion was effected the better it would be for all. The prolonged transitional conditions were harmful, the suspence was corrosive ; a master mind was needed to guide the people in the days of intellectual upsurge.

It was a good fortune of the Kashmiris that they had not to wait for long to see such a friend and philosopher rising from their midst. As a matter of fact, Lalla the genius who tackled the gigantic problem and hit at the right solution was born in 1335 A.D. while Udayanadeva was on the throne and the Hindu rule was still painfully gasping on its death bed.

Lalla belonged to a Brahman family who had their ancestral home at Puranadhishthan (modern Pandrethan) a village three miles distant from Srinagar but now incorporated with it. From the early years of her childhood it became manifest that she was an intellectual prodigy but times were so out of joint that nobody took any particular notice of her uncommon talents which were allowed to remain undeveloped till she entered her teens. Worse still, the parents married her while quite young to a stupid Brahman boy of Pampore whose mother was perhaps exceptionally cruel and had an aptitude for teasing the docile daughter-in-law. Many painful stories of inhuman torture which Lalla had to suffer at the hands of her stone-hearted mother-in-law are narrated to this day in Kashmiri homes. She had to work like a drudge from early morning till midnight and perform all irksome and arduous tasks in the house. Yet she was knavely starved. Her plate was filled with a boulder on which were thinly spread a handful of boiled rice to show to the onlookers that Lalla was a ravenous eater and was generously supplied with a large quantity of food. Repeatedly she was reprimanded and rebuked, mostly undeservedly.

Lalla's husband was not only totally indifferent to the trials that she had to undergo, he often sided with his unscrupulous mother to the exasperation of the young and virtuous wife. Lalla, however, learned to be calm, tolerant and peaceful during the days of the ordeal. This was the first school she had to attend in her long life spent in ideological and spiritual struggle which she was soon called upon to wage.

What immediate cause finally urged her to run away from her home and adopt the garb of a wanderer in search of Eternal Bliss is not exactly known. Various tales are extant which are fictitious and legendary hiding the facts on which they must have once been based. It is commonly believed that, while facing her persecuters, Lalla performed several miracles to reveal her divine personality which excited the curiosity in the neighbourhood and gradually more and more people became

inquisitive about her. Surrounded by multitudes, she could no longer live under the roof of her husband. To acknowledge the intrinsic greatness of the revolutionary thinker it is not necessary to have faith in the gift of miracle-making. Lalla shines brighfly by the loftiness of her ideals, the depth of her thoughts and the force of her convictions. Only petty and ignorant minds remain unsatisfied without hearing stories of miracles about the lives of benefactors of humanity.

Not many years of her married life had passed when Lalla decided to forsake her kith and kin to join the family of Man. She was young, probably not more than twenty-five years old, when the domestic ties were snapped by her to become a seeker after truth. Her subsequent story shows that the renunciation was not sudden; she was fully prepared for it mentally; it was pre-meditated and well thought-out.

The first notable person with whom Lalla came in contact after renunciation was one Sidha Bayu, an eminent scholar of Sanskrit literature, an erudite expounder of the Shaiva cult and a master of the Trika philosophy. Long were the discussions which they held on the fundamental truths and metaphysics. A glimpse of these illuminating discourses has been provided by the scanty record of a talk which was held by the two in the presence of Lalla's husband who, becoming aware of her virtues, still cherished the vain hope of reclaiming her as his wife. They wanted to investigate and find out (1) the best light, (2) the best religious place, (3) the best friend, and (4) the best happiness. The first to initiate the debate was Lalla's husband. He said :

Chandras heu na prakash kanh Gangi heu na tirath kanh
Bhardav heu na bhando kanh Rani heu na sukh kanh.

(There is no light like the moonlight; no holy place like the Ganga, no friends like blood relations and no giver of joy like wife).

Then spoke the Shaivite scholar Sidha Bayu :

Achhin heu na prakash kanh Kwathyan heu na tirth kanh
Chandas heu na bhando kanh Aris zuwas heu na sukh kanh

(There is no light like eye-sight; no pilgrimage like one's legs; no friend like one's pocket and no joy like perfect health).

Lalla expressed her views last of all :

Myus hue na prakash kanh Pyus hue na tirath kanh
Dayes heu na bhando kanh Bayes heu no sukh kanh.

(There is no light like the spiritual drink, no holy place like the Knowledge of the Secret : no friend like God and no happiness like the fear of Evil).

The profundity of Lalla's observations silenced both the

hearers ; the husband was put to shame and for ever convinced that he was unfit to claim the unconventional thinker as his spouse ; the Shaivite philosopher realized that he had nothing to teach her.

Next, Lalla came across an orthodox Brahman, staunch believer in idolatry and puranic ritualism. Through advocacy of monotheism and power of reasoning she made the dogmatic Brahman understand that idol worship was no means to realisation of Nirvana or to attain Eternal Bliss ; that it was a forlorn cause which could have no room in the New Kashmir that was rising from the ashes of the old through the impact of Islam. She not only denounced the blind worship of stone idols and images in all forms and under any circumstances, she also opposed meaningless rituals and demoralising ceremonies, the excrescences over the soft and shiny core of Dharma.

By exchanging views and holding discourses on philosophical topics, principles of theology and fundamentals of ethics with scores of learned men of her time, Lalla had fully grasped the essentials of the religion professed by her forefathers and the culture of her homeland. But she was yet uninitiated in the mysteries of the new faith which had been recently introduced in the valley and a follower of which was ruling the land as its sovereign. As one whose consuming passion was ceaseless search after truth, Lalla could neither ignore the rapidly spreading creed nor even remain indifferent to it. When the Sayid refugees poured into Kashmir from Hamadan and other towns of Iran she lost no time or opportunity to meet them and hear the exposition of the principles and tenets of Islam from the best informed and the most learned among them. She had long interviews and frequent arguments with Sayid Jalal-ud-din Bukhari, Sayid Hussain Simnani and the most illustrious of the order, Sayid Mir Ali, known in Kashmir by the popular and adored appellation of Shah Hamdan. While smaller minds in the valley who were awed, dazed and overwhelmed by the zealous orations of the Muslim missionaries, hastily embraced the new religion discarding the old, the balanced and calm mind of Lalla declined to take that course. Discriminately, she tried to assimilate the fresh truths. Her faith in the Trika philosophy was not supplanted by what she learnt through the intellectual debates with the Sayid savants ; only her knowledge was supplemented, her outlook broadened, and her formative mind

attained greater maturity. The glorious outcome of this mental churning was a synthesis of the two philosophies which was given to the world in poetic sermons by the wandering minstrel through the rest of her life.

The sayings of Lalla are eclectic in nature which contain the basic truths of both the Trika (which in itself was a blend of ancient Brahmanism and heretic Buddhism) and Islam as propounded by Shah Hamdan and his faithful band of Sayid preachers. Lalla is the originator, founder and first votary of the new creed—the Religious Humanism—which remains the mainstay of the Kashmir culture till the modern times. She was a link between the fading past and the rising future, the herald of a new order.

That in founding the revolutionary philosophy, Lalla was expressing the urgent need of the times by providing the panacea for the ills endured by the distressed society of her days, is amply borne out by the fact that Religious Humanism was increasingly accepted by all communities and classes of the people. The progressive sections among both the Hindus and the Muslims eagerly welcomed it with open arms and took it upon themselves to popularise it ; only bigots, fanatics and zealots ranged themselves stubbornly against it. The enlightened Muslim monarchs prominent among whom was Zain-ul-abidin Bud Shah reared his political philosophy on the basis of her teachings which stabilised the Muslim rule and gave it a long lease of life.

Lalla lived till a ripe old age and through the major part of it she roamed about within Kashmir in semi-nude form wearing tattered garments, mere rags, to preach her gospel. She was full of zest for life and used to dance and sing wherever she went. Men and women, rich and poor, young and old, handsome and ugly were alike to her. In youth her physical features were attractive and manners refined but in middle age her stomach bulged and protruding dewlaps were formed which displayed her indifference, perhaps positive contempt, for bodily comforts ; but she remained graceful and effulgent to the last of her days.

At the time of her death a quarrel arose between Hindus and Muslims over the disposal of her mortal remains. While the Hindus wanted to cremate the dead body the Muslims insisted on burying it. How the issue was finally settled is conjectural. The Hindus assert that when the winding sheet was

uncovered only a few flowers were seen to the pleasant surprise of the contestants, but the Muslims point out an old grave outside Jama Masjid at Bijbehara (Vijbror) as the resting place of Lalla Moj.

Opinions differ on the subject of Lalla's education. Some believe that she was illiterate and could, like some world teachers, neither read nor write ; but others do not agree with this view. Brahman girls in ancient and medieval times at any rate till the end of the fourteenth century, were generally educated by their parents and could read and teach Sanskrit. Unless Lalla's father was exceptionally hostile to girls education, there is no reason to suppose that she was deprived of even the elementary lessons in Sanskrit. So far as is known her parents were well-to-do and in affluent circumstances. So it is probable that she was literate and had studied some Hindu scriptures. This much is however certain that Lalla never cared to pen down her thoughts. Her sayings were preserved by numerous admirers either in her own lifetime or after she was gone. A good deal of the precious record has disappeared; much of what is extant has suffered mutilation through interpolations by ignorant or overzealous enthusiasts. With the dawn of modern era in Kashmir several Indologists and Kashmir scholars have painstakingly edited the remnants of the sayings in different editions and forms. One translation in Sanskrit with text in Devnagri script by Bhaskaracharya prepared long ago has been published by the Research Department of the Kashmir Government. Two famous oriental scholars, Sir George Grierson and Dr. Dional D. Barnett, have edited the sayings and translated them into English. Another scholar of distinction, Sir Richard Temple, has rendered them in English verse. Certain Kashmiris, notably Anand Koul, Prof. J.L. Kaul and Sarwanand Charagi, too, have partly translated and published Lallavakyani (Sayings of Lalla). In quoting below some of what Lalla said, I have drawn from almost all the publications which came to my notice.

During the closing days of her life and increasingly more so after she was dead, Lalla became the moving spirit of the people. She was acclaimed equally by Hindus and Muslims as their mother, heroine and preceptress. While the Hindus reverentially called her Laleshwari or Lalla Yogeshwari, the Muslims affectionately remembered her by the name of Lalla Moj. She is, however, commonly known today throughout the valley and

even beyond the borders of Kashmir by the beloved appellation of Lal Ded (Mother Lalla).

Lal Ded, like the Buddha, preached her doctrines in the idiom of the masses and not in high-flown Sanskrit, the vehicle of expression used by all the scholars and the educated classes of her time. Her message is meant for one and all; it could not be confined to the homes of the rich or restricted to the circles of the upper castes. She desired to shake people out of their mental torpor, to urge the sluggish minds to become active and to awaken the intellectually indolent. Her objectives were philosophical revolution and cultural renaissance on a country-wide scale. For their achievement Sanskrit would hardly have been a suitable instrument. She could not therefore help using the Kashmiri dialect to propogate her ideas. She was eminently successful in this enterprise and, incidentally, became the first author in this language.

Lala Ded is a confirmed monotheist, an unshakable believer in the one and only God. But God to her is not a despot living apart from man and arbitrarily wielding unlimited power as He is so frequently depicted by religious-minded people. To her He is the Universal Law, the All-Pervading Force which is beneficial for all. Man is an inalienable part of this Universal Self and equal with God, the only difference being that God commands the senses while man, so long as he remains in ignorance and apart, works as a slave of the senses.[1] (54). In a state of slavery man prays and seeks fulfilment of his desires from God, master of everything, little thinking that he never keeps watch over the numberless goods in gift of nature nor deprives any one from enjoying them. Man can secure anything he likes provided he qualifies himself for it by his own behaviour. (78).

What qualifies man for the enjoyment of heavenly bliss? This we must learn from the working of nature herself. The first thing that strikes us on a close observation of the creation of God is the non-differentiation or the equal treatment of all good and wicked, rich and poor, high caste or low caste, eastern or western. "The sun shines equally on every place holy or unholy; the wind enters every home and benefits without distinction every living soul. To know truth is difficult

1. Figures within brackets indicate number of stanza in Lalla Vakyani by S. N. Charagi.

indeed, but let a searcher meditate on this." Lal Ded unreservedly denounces blind dogmas, irrational rituals, mutual hatred, racial prejudice and debasing distinction of caste. She is a non-conformist and not infrequently expresses views in conflict with the prevalent opinions. The core of religion, according to her, consists in the equality of men and women, human brotherhood, and unity of God and man. She acknowledges the essential soundness in the basic philosophies of all creeds and religions (44):

"Shiv chhu thali thali rozan
Mo zan heund ta murusalman
Truk ai chhuk pan panun parzanav
so chhai sahibus sati zanizan"

Shiva permeants this Universe
Don't discriminate between a Hindu and a Muslim
If thou art sharp enough, know thyself.

Though born in a Brahman family Lalla is prepared to adopt any one of the divinities which would help her to attain the ultimate goal of supreme happiness. "Whether it be the Shiva (of the Trika), Keshava (of the Vaishnavas), Kamlajanatha (of the Vedantins) or the Jina (of the Jains)", she used to stress, "by whatever name the wvrshipper may call the Supreme Being, He is still the All Powerful and He alone can release the enslaved soul from bondage." But idolatory in any form is unacceptable to her ; it is senseless and stupid :

"Idol is of stone, temple is of stone
Above (temple) and below (idol) are one,
Which of them will thou worship, O, Foolish Pandit ?
Cause thou the union of mind and soul."

Like a Muslim sufi faqir as well as a Shaivite philosopher she uttered :

"The same stone is in the road and in the pedestal
The same stone is sacred place.
The same stone is the turning wheell
Shiva is difficult to be attained, take a hint of guidance (from the Guru)."

She was opposed to the meaningless usages, religious rituals and orthodox practices which had corroded the society and made human heart barren and devoid of finer sentiments :

"God does not want meditations and austerities
Through love alone canst thou reach the abode of bliss
Thou mayst be lost like salt in water
Still it is difficult for thee to know God."

Mental discipline, moderation, balance and constant striving after self-improvement, these are the first steps on the path to

spiritual (and also wordly) freedom. The man adequately equipped with these need have nothing more; his success is guaranteed even if he be otherwise empty-handed and without the means which appear essential in the eyes of common people.

"Think not of things that are without
Fix upon thy inner self thy thought :
So shalt thou be freed from let or doubt;
Precepts these that my preceptor taught.
Dance, then, Lalla, clad but in sky :
Air and sky; what garment is more fair;
"Cloth" saith custom. Doth that sanctify ?

Her emphasis on self-restraint is great. She perhaps never heard of Aristotle but like him she too has chosen the "golden middle" as the best path. "By over-eating you will achieve nothing and by not eating at all you will imbibe conceit of having become an ascetic", she warns the seeker, "Eat moderately, O, darling ! and you will achieve blissful balance. By living in moderation diverse doors (of success) will be unbolted upon you." On reading this one is reminded of a similar definition of Yoga in the Bhagvad Geeta.

Self-abnegation, purity of thought, consistency in word and deed, absence of greed, avarice and egoism in general and non-attachment with low interests are the essence of Lal Ded's teachings. She was never weary of asserting that only when a man had secured freedom from evil desire, lust and pride could he attain nirvana :

"All impurities within me I burnt away,
And I did slay my heart,
I came to be known as the pious Lalla,
Only when I cleaned into him these;
Only when I sat, just there, waiting for his grace."

No progress is possible in the absence of mental discipline ; even renunciation of the world is vain and useless in its absence :

"Some have abandoned home
Some the forest abode
What use the hermitage if thou controllest not thine mind."

In the spirit of a Vedantin, Lal Ded would declare : "Fear of death is baseless; who will die and whom will they kill? who will kill and who will be killed ? The person who has no ideal and cherishes no purpose in life, the one who is engrossed in self-love and blinded by selfishness, does not exist in reality; he is dead, though living" (21).

Experience had taught Lalla that society hardly forgave those daring to differ from it and one earnestly in quest of truth was bound to be villified and persecuted. But she exhorted her followers to remain steadfast and sincerely devoted to the ideals of love and service to humanity in utter disregard of the praise or condemnation that might be their lot as a result; she used to sing :

"Let them leer or cheer me
Let anybody say what he likes ;
Let good persons worship me with flowers ;
What can any one of them gain, I being pure ?
If the world talks ill of me,
My heart shall harbour no ill-will,
If I am a true worshipper of God ;
Can ashes leave a stain on a mirror?"

Salvation is beyond the grasp of those whose dealings with others are dishonest or whose transactions are fraudulent. Artfulness, craftiness and slyness are powerless before uprightness of character. How can a crook harm a straightforward man ? (6)

Having realised the true essence of Reality, a man should sacrifice his entire possessions to attain that noble ideal. He should control the six senses and take to the right path. Then alone he will reach the stage of illumination (17). Greed, lust, conceit and arrogance are impediments and should be shunned like highway robbers. In great humility should the goal be approached (41). "I searched everywhere for the Bliss and wearied myself in vain ; I found that it was very hard for anyone to reach at the Hidden Knowledge ; then I started deep thinking and meditations and lo, I arrived near the Abode of Nectar. Strange it is that though the filled jars of truth are within everyone yet no one cares to drink from them." (31).

Education is helpful, scholarship an admirable achievement, but it is a deceitful idea to imagine that study of literature or recitation of scriptures alone can bring knowledge or salvation. Thoughtless people read books just as parrot repeats the name of Rama in a cage. Holy scriptures are read and often quoted to justify infirmities and misdeeds. Knowledge to be fruitful must be assimilated and good sermons, if they are of any value, practised in life (51).

The Law is inexorable and relentless ; in its universal domain miracles are inadmissible ; everything must function according

to its nature. A wise man does not desire anything contrary to this unfailing process. "To bid water not to flow, to expect raging flame to cool, to walk on one's feet towards the sky, to labour at milking a wooden cow, are the acts of a juggler and not a sane person (56). This world is neither good nor bad ; it is the individual approach that makes it either one or the other. For fools and vain people it is like a hot frying-pan, but for self-controlled and balanced yogis it is a source of great knowledge which, of course, has to be gained by the constant efforts at self-realisation (75).

The path of seeker after Supreme Bliss is not easy; it is full of pitfalls ; there are successes and failures. Endeavours in this direction are beset with tremendous difficulties. But inexhaustible patience and dogged perseverence can carry the aspirant to the final goal. "Patience like salt and pepper tastes bitter ; who will take it ? Besides, it is too dear and very few are prepared to pay the price." (76). "Those who forsake ambition to hoard wealth, possess riches and enjoy luxuries, and who voluntarily adopt simple life, endure hardships and are ever-vigilant, are the people who succeed in the end. If only a misguided man could comprehend the essence of this truism." (77)

That man can not feel the pain of others who is never afflicted with it himself. He who is possessed with the intense desire of achieving a lofty ideal is unmindful of what others say while he is engaged in the accomplishment of his task. He may be pelted, abused or kicked but he remains undeterred. (81). Let others say what they will ; let them jeer at me or cheer me up ; let some others worship me with flowers ; so long as I am pure at heart and honest in my resolve, the critics can do me no harm. (44).

Success is for the selfless and the brave. A timid hawk is baffled by the bravery of a lioness. What idea can a barren woman form of paternal anguish and solicitude ? How can a piece of wood be compared with candle-stick ? The self-sacrifice of moth is beyond the comprehension of a fly (83).

Reputation and public applause are the two weaknesses which a man desirous of reaching the final goal should persistently avoid while advancing. These even if achieved are ephemeral and do not stay long ; they are like water held in wicker basket. True success lies in becoming the master of the restless senses. If some mighty man can hold the wind in his fist, if he can

tether an elephant with a hair, he alone can claim integrity and high repute (94). In any case let not a seeker grope in the dark nor run after fleeting shadows. If he is intelligent he will dive deep within himself ? for the real remedy of misfortunes lies there and nowhere else. Let him have faith in these words (58).

In right aspiration and right conduct there can be no failure. To strive despite setbacks and to finally attain the objective was what Lalla taught throughout her life :

"Searching and seeking Him. I, Lalla, wearied myself
And beyond my strength I strove
Then, looking for Him, I found His doors closed and latched.
This deepened my longing and stiffened my resolve;
And I would not move but stood where I was,
Full of longing and love, I gazed on Him."

And what happened thereafter :

"Passionate with longing in my eyes, searching wide and seeking nightand day.
Lo ! I beheld the Truthful one, the Wise,
Here in mine own house to fill my gaze.
That was the day of my lucky star,
Breathless, I held him my guide to be."

This, in brief, is the philosophy of Lalla which she preached in the simple and colloquial Kashmiri dialect of her own days. There can be no doubt that the teachings had a close bearing on the disintegrating political and social conditions in which she had her being, though whatever she said had apparently reference only to the spiritual and religious life. Her insistence on the improvement of the individual morality was quite appropriate as the ruin of the Kashmir society had been primarily caused by the fall in ethical standards of the people. The stress she laid on fundamental unity of religions, on non-duality of God and on equality of all human beings was essential for the smooth progress of Kashmir which at the close of the fourteenth century was inhabited no more by the followers of any single creed. In a land infested with selfish, greedy and avaricious politicians, selflessness, self-restraint and self-abnegation were just the qualities needed in patriots to raise the standards of public life; her advice that one should be prepared to face difficulties and endure hardships was to the same end. Nevertheless, Lalla believed in living life and getting the best out of it; her faith in ascetcism was scanty.

Many of the sayings and sermons of Lalla were full of mysticism, incomprehensible to rational minds; she talked in riddles and metaphors:

"Heedless ever that the Day Sublime
Cometh when the wicked looketh not
When the apple of the autumn time
Ripens with the summer apricot."

Expounding her religious experiences and yogic practices, she said :

"So my lamp of knowledge afar,
Fanned by slow breath from the throat of me,
They, my bright soul to my self revealed,
Winnowed I abroad my inner light;
And with darkness all around me sealed
Did I garner truth and hold Him tight."

Undoubtedly Lalla was a bold thinker, an iconoclast and a passionate lover of truth. But, in critically examining creeds and philosophies and in discarding religious dogmas and caste rituals, there was a limit beyond which she did not venture to travel. She took some of the hoary theories for granted and did not challenge certain time-honoured doctrines.

Nor are her sayings free from the blemish of inconsistency. She was an idealist and a mystic ; she would like a seeker to throw himself at the feet of Master and pray for His mercy ; yet she frequently advised inculcation of self-confidence, and acceptance of no help from any power. Though a robust believer in God traces of agnosticism too are discernible in her thinking and some of her sayings can do credit to any materialist philosopher of the modern times. Perhaps such incongruities were part and parcel of the age to which Lalla belonged.

Like several great thinkers, prophets and benefactors of humanity, Lalla was considered crazy in the beginning. Small minds were bewildered, pharisees offended and the orthodox outraged by her views exposing the rottenness of society. Her persecution was long and severe but ultimately she triumphed.

The sayings of Lalla generated an intellectual revolution in Kashmir and when King Zain-ul-abidin adoped her creed as the basis of his political philosophy, Kashmir entered the second Golden Era of its history. There was peace and tranquility in the land and an all-round prosperity was witnessed by the people for many decades.

Lalla did not create any order of disciples or a distinct sect of followers; she was content with having imparted the message to the world through her countrymen. The task of founding a body of hermits espousing the cause of Religious Humanism was left to her immediate successor and another master of resurgence

movement, Sheikh Noor-ud-din, popularly known as Nund Rishi, patron saint of the Kashmiris, who was born at village Kaimuh in the year 1377 A.D. and baptised by her.

There is a legend that at the time of his birth Noor-ud-din refused to suck at the breasts of his mother, Sudra, and when he was brought before Lalla she rebuked the new-born baby for the false renunciation; thereupon, the boy began to have his natural nourishment. Later on, Lalla initiated Noor-ud-din into the secrets and the mysteries of Religious Humanism which brought inner peace and poise for which he was pining from his childhood. Sheikh Noor-ud-din had a large number of followers at the time of his death who organised the religious order known as Rishis or Babas in the valley. In his *Memoirs*, Jehangir wrote about the Rishis that "they restrain the tongue of desire and the foot of seeking. They eat no flesh, they have no wives, and always plant fruit-bearing trees in fields so that men may benefit from them, themselves desiring no advantage. They abuse no one. There are about 2,000 of these in the valley."[2] The principles adumbrated by Lalla were thus integrated into the lives of the people in Kashmir within a century after her death.

2. Quoted in *Kashir*, Vol. 1, P. 96.

CHAPTER SIX

EMINENT MUSLIM QUEENS

IT is true that under the Muslim rule the upper class women lost many of the rights and privileges which they enjoyed throughout the ancient period and until the deposition and death of Kotadevi. Queens were no more crowned or annointed with sacred water at the time of coronation of kings nor had they their own treasuries or councillors. The ladies of well-to-do homes no longer took part in politics nor acted as diplomats nor lead troops. Appearance of women in public was frowned upon and daughters of royal and respectable birth were sequestered in the harem. But the restrictions and confinement to which she was subjected could not prevent an energetic and wise queen from exerting the influence of her powerful personality even from behind the veil or the recesses of the seraglio. She meddled in politics, interfered in the administration, foiled intrigues hatched by hostile elements, frustrated the evil designs of wicked courtiers and set matters right which had gone awry. Besides, some of the Muslim queens and ladies of noble birth took prominent part in religious reform and social uplift.

1. Lachhma

The first among such remarkable women to attract our attention is Lachhma or Lakshmidevi, wife of Sultan Shahab-ud-din (1354-1373 A.D.) The Muslim rule was not yet well established when the king ascended the throne ; the large majority of the population was still Hindu ; therefore the old manners, customs and culture continued to hold sway ; and the farsighted Muslim sultans fraternised with their Hindu

subjects. Shahab-ud-din was a liberal monarch of broad views and benevolent disposition. It was his great desire to be just to every sect and class of the people ; he especially wanted to gain good-will of the Hindus. With that end in view, the king married Lachhma, the daughter of a distinguished Hindu Bhatta named Avtara, and refused to have any other girl as his spouse.

Shahab-ud-din and Lachhma were deeply attached to each other. Never would the monarch decide an important matter whether of domestic nature or public significance without having previous consultation with the queen. And it often proved beneficial for the country to do so. For Lachhma was intelligent and sagacious besides being virtuous, simple and generous.

Sultan Shahab-ud-din's ruling passion was to bring the neighbouring countries under his subjugation. After five centuries of misrule and the consequent imbecility, it was under him that Kashmir troops were once again led on conquering expeditions and the country re-achieved military distiction. By might of his arms the king subdued Tibet, Jammu, the Punjab, Sind, Nagarkot (Kangra), Gazna, Qandhar, Kashgar and Badakshan which all owed allegiance to him, In planning these expeditions Lachhma was a source of inspiration and help to Shahab-ud-din. So when he returned from abroad with enormous riches secured as war booty, he founded a glorious town in the name of the queen at the foot of the Hari Parbat at the spot which is now known as Deviangan. Lakshminagar or Lakshmipur as historian Srivara calls the town, was adorned with beautiful mansions and provided with all amenities of life which could be made available during those days,[1] Soon it acquired the fame of a celebrated town full of virtuous men.[2]

But as Shahab-ud-din advanced in age his affection for the queen waned and his control over the passions loosened. Either because she had no issue of her own at that time or for some other obscure reason, Lachhma had brought up Lassa, a daughter of her own sister. This child grew rapidly into a youthful, attractive and voluptuous maiden whose looks irresistibly drew Shahab-ub-din to her. The king decided to marry Lassa. The faithful and self-respecting queen was cut to the quick and made great efforts to stop the solemnisation of

1. *Kings of Kashmira*, Vol. III, P. 197.
2. Ibid., P. 41.

nuptials. But the king remained adamant in his resolve and despite the strong protests of Lachhma the marriage was celebrated. To add to the queen's misery, the newly-wedded Lassa adopted an hostile attitude and constantly provoked the king to humiliate the stricken lady. Lachhma's powers were curtailed and she was forbidden to utilise her influence in any way. Not content with this, Lassa suggested to the king that the two princes born of Lachhma should not be permitted to live in Kashmir. Shahab-ud-din had grown so spineless through infatuation that he could not even decline to exile his own sons, the only progeny that he had. Conditions thus became unendurable for the proud queen she left the palace and went to live with her relatives in the distant land of Sind.

The separation of Lachhma shocked Shahab-ud-din which rekindled the fire of the old affection in his contrite heart for the beloved queen. He felt ashamed and despatched remorseful letters to Lachhma and the princes imploring them to forgive him and return to their homeland. The princes firmly declined to come back to the land from which they had been exiled for no fault of theirs. How Lachhma would have responded to the call of penitence, it is difficult to say. For, while she was still pondering, Shahab-ud-din breathed his last in 1373 A.D.

But for this faithlessness towards his devoted queen, Shahab-ud-din shines as a brave, generous and open-minded monarch equally praised by Hindu and Muslim historians. The blots that this episode has left on the otherwise stainless escutcheon of the king have brought disrepute and discredit to his great name during the past six hundred years.

2. Bibi Haura

Sultan Qutub-ud-din (1373-1389 A. D.) had a resourceful and active spouse named Bibi Haura. It is strange and inexplicable that no mention is made by the contemporary historian of her activities during the sixteen year-long reign of her husband. But there can be little doubt that she must have assisted the king and learnt the intricacies of politics as well as the difficulties in the path of successfully governing the country while Qutub-ud-din was alive. For immediately after the king's death Bibi Haura was called upon to act as the regent of the vast dominion because Sikandar, her son and heir-apparent, was an infant. What is more, the dowager queen was successful in

defending the throne against many onslaughts from various directions and in sailing the ship of state on an even keel so long as she remained at the helm of affairs.

King Qutub-ud-din had to face several troubles in his lifetime. Intrigues had been set afoot and the banner of rebellion raised to dethrone and assassinate him. The king quelled these disturbances with an iron hand. A devastating famine broke out claiming a heavy toll of human life when the king performed a Yajna to ward off the calamity besides distributing foodgrains to relieve the distressed. It is safe to surmise that Bibi Haura proved helpful to the vexed king in curbing the evil designs and machinations of his foes and in assuaging the lacerated hearts of his famished and bereaved subjects. Thus alone could the queen have received the requisite training which stood her in good stead at the time when she was unanimously summoned by the courtiers and grandees to bear the burden of supervising the government of the country during the period of her son's infancy.

King Qutub-ud-din and Bibi Haura were advanced in life when they were blessed with a child. Jonaraja says that it was with the good wishes of a Yogi named Brahmanathan and through his special favour that the king got a son in old age when his hair had begun to turn grey.[3] After some time the royal couple was fortunate to have another son. The king however died soon after in 1389 A D.

Sikandar, the elder of the two princes, was no more than eight years old when his father passed away. There were many enemies of the ruling dynasty who included some of the nearest relatives of the deceased king. Ambitious men, enlisting support of hostile and disgruntled elements, embarked upon conspiratorial adventures to capture power. It appeared easy to defeat a lady, murder the young princes and overthrow the Royal House. But the treasonous-minded politicians had reckoned without the marvellous courage of heroic Haura. No sooner was she invested with the authority and powers of the Regent than she girded up her loins to exterminate all elements which harboured any malice towards the boy-king. She had been reputed for her piety, kind-heartedness and benevolence previously but when the occasion demanded she displayed other amazing attributes of her character. To the guilty she was

3. Ibid., P. 53.

harsh, ruthless and cruel; she would not forgive her own kith and kin when they were found out and proved to be involved in criminal conspiracies or anti-government deeds.

Sikandar's two prominent ministers were Uddaka (known also as Ray Magre) and Sahaka who, though they consoled the queen and assured her of their full support, soon became a source of anxiety to her due to their mutual rivalry and animosity. Their constant bickerings endangered the security of the state and encouraged the rebellious elements to execute their nefarious schemes. Haura realised that until the two troublesome ministers were firmly checked the stability of administration was bound to be jeopardised. She boldly charged both, accused them of contumacious behaviour and punished them with dismissal.

The step proved quite efficacious as a timely warning to the erring officials. Satisfied with the result, Haura took some more drastic steps. Her daughter and son-in-law, Mohammed Shah, were reported to have conspired to depose the boy-king and usurp the throne. The queen-mother got them arrested and ordered a sifting enquiry to be made into the grave charge. The accusation proved to be well-founded. Unhesitatingly, Haura got the couple executed. Her action was adversely commented upon ; near relations were enraged ; intimate friends were scared. But it gave a quietus to all the evil-intentioned courtiers and others who had designs on the throne. Peace was re-established and tranqullity restored to the land.

Haura next devoted her attention to re-organising the civil administration and managing the defence forces. In this too she did well for, until she continued to remain in power, no more internal disturbances broke out nor did any outside power have the courage to invade Kashmir.

We do not know when Haura died or how long she functioned as the Regent. Probably she wielded the rod of authority for ten years (1389-1399 A. D.) till Sikandar came of age. It was a period of comparative peace and progress which is remarkable, particularly in view of the storm which burst over the valley subsequently; it was caused by the religious zeal and bigotry of Sultan Sikandar known to the Kashmiris by the more common and unsavoury appellation of *But Shikan* (idol breaker). The good work done by Haura was set at naught which made the people remember her all the more during the dark days.

3. Gul Khatun

The next queen to be noticed by contemporary historians is Gul Khatun, the virtuous wife of the profligate Sultan, Haider Shah (1470-1472 A. D.). This graceful lady was very popular among the Kashmiris because she walked in the footsteps of her father-in-law, the famous Bud Shah. There is no doubt that the queen should have proved a great asset to a wise ruler as his spouse and helper in the affairs of state. But Haider Shah was a contemptible wretch who took pleasure in the company of vulgar, mean and wicked people and abandoned himself to licentiousness, debauchery and other low pursuits. By his wild ways and immoderate living the king soon ended his life; he remained on the throne for hardly two years and most of that brief period he spent in animal enjoyments. Gul Khatun frequently found him in a drunken state and made tremendous efforts to wean him away from the pernicious habit but all in vain.

The death of Haider Shah abruptly ended the promising public career of the suave queen in the governmental sphere; but she possessed a fund of energy which she wanted to utilize for the welfare of her countrymen. Haider Shah was succeeded by Hassan Shah who gave indications of sprouting into a prudent ruler. Therefore, Gul Khatun's interest in the social affairs remained unflagged even after 1472 A. D. Shorn of political power, however, the scope for her activities was limited. Obviously it was inadvisable for her to meddle in administrative matters though her talent and experience entitled her to do so. Wisely, she bended her energies in building mosques, khanqahs, schools and alms-houses. Historian Srivara says that Gul Khatun was like the former queen Didda and built besides other structures a large religious edifice called the Madrassa.[4] Sultan Hassan Shah, accompanied by the father of the queen-mother, entered this magnificent building and was so overjoyed and impressed with its grandeur that he ordered festivities to be held at great expense for a fortnight. Srivara records that the intellectuals of the time considered the festivities an inadequate honour to the brilliance and pains which Gul Khatun had expended over planning and building the Madrassa; so awe-inspiring and architecturally beautiful it was.

The virtue that made Gul Khatun illustrious was her deep

4. Ibid., Vol. III, P. 225.

affection for the people. Her admiration for the indigenous culture was immense. Devoted to Islam and engaged in executing manifold works for the furtherance of that creed, she was equally anxious to see that the ancient traditions and observances of Kashmir were protected and cherished. She was a supporter of the Religious Humanist movement and for that reason both Hindus and Muslims claimed her to be their own.

But Gul Khatun was not destined to live long. She died suddenly in the prime of youth and in the midst of active life. The contemporary historian mentions the incident in these words :

> "Gul Khatun had reared Hassan Shah during his infancy with her milk. She had opposed the king when he began to form irregular habits, and restrained his wavering heart even as the sea-shore restrains the sea. She favoured the customs of the Hindus as the light of the sun favours the lotus ; and all men thought of her and lamented and wept for her".[5]

Deprived of Gul Khatun's guidance and advice, Hassan Shah felt forlorn and lustreless. Gradually he slipped into bad habits and ruined himself. It is possible that had the queen lived longer, the king might have ended his rule as gloriously as he had started it.

4. Mera Mukhat

Sultan Hassan Shah (1472-1484 A. D.) had several queens the best known among them being Mera Mukhat or, as Muslim historians call her, Hayat Khatun. She was from an outside Sayid family with whom, because of their descent from the holy prophet, Sultan Zain-ul-abidin contracted matrimonial alliance. But the Sayids looked down upon Kashmir as a foreign land of low caste men ; they despised both Hindu and Muslim Kashmiris. After the death of Bud Shah some of the Sayids aspired to rule the valley and conspired to capture the throne.

With a philosophical bent of mind Hassan Shah loved to spend his time in the assemblies of savants and scholars. He had made an intensive study of the sacred books of Islam and was also well-versed in the six schools of Hindu philosophy. Like all princes of Shah Mir dynasty he could read and write in Sanskrit. He was a lover of fine arts and architecture. Above all, his affection for Kashmiri language and indigenous culture was unbounded. His ideal was Bud Shah and it was his resolve to pursue the wholesome policy that his grandfather had laid

5. Ibid., Vol. III, P. 229.

down and reared but which had been interrupted in the days of Haider Shah. The first step that Hassan Shah took to implement his plans was the appointment of Malik Ahmad, an equally good intentioned patriot, as the Prime Minister. This was a warning to those mischief-mongers, trouble-makers and peace-disturbers who had gained influence and notoriety in the previous regime to behave well or suffer the consequences of misbehaviour. Among the undesirable elements were the Sayids, the nearest relations of the king. Instead of accurately reading the mind of Hassan Shah and adapting their ways to the altered policy of the new regime, the Sayids, in their conceit, spurned the royal instructions issued with the purpose of ending wanton disrespect of Kashmiri nobles and offence to local sentiments. The new Premier was also treated with scant courtesy. Thereupon, the infuriated king ordered all the Sayids to quit the state and not to return to the valley without his written permission. Hassan Shah would hear no arguments and accept no defence ; he declined to stay the execution of his commands even for a short duration. The Sayids were turned out, bag and baggage, to the utter consternation of their adherents and sympathisers.

The disgrace heaped upon the heads of her elders was a great blow to Mera Mukhat. But her affection for Kashmir was in no way less than her regard for her kinsmen. She was also aware of the fact that her relatives had not behaved correctly. Considering opposition to the strong will of her husband futile she decided to yield at the moment and bide her time. She was a resourceful woman commanding powers of persuasion and capable of hood-winking politicians and of creating rifts in the ranks of enemies. From the very day that her kinsmen were exiled, Mera Mukhat started taking interest in administration and kept herself informed of the currents and cross-currents of politics. Her first endeavour was to inspire confidence of Hassan Shah in herself. It took her some years to achieve this end but ultimately she was successful in hypnotising the king and bringing him under her complete control.

Whether through some contrivance of Mera Mukhat or because of their mutual malice and rivalry, the two outstanding ministers, Premier Malik Ahmed and General Tazi Bhatt, fell out. The former had rendered yoeman service to the king at a time when the country was passing through a difficult period and the

latter had achieved undying fame and popularity among the people through his successful military exploits. During prosperous days two gifted men respect and admire each other, but when evil days come the one cannot endure the nobility of the other. As a sign of their approaching doom, Malik Ahmed and Tazi Bhatt started to find fault with each other and soon became sworn enemies. However, neither was powerful enough to destroy his rival. Mera Mukhat was the last person to lose such a golden opportunity for the furtherance of her plan. Making common cause with Malik Ahmed she befooled him and made him submit a proposal to the king for recall of the Sayids. The personal hatred of the General had clouded the-once-clear intellect of the Prime Minister and rendered him incapable of foreseeing the disastrous consequences of the proposal. But he was soon to get disillusioned. He realised, alas when it was too late, that those whom he recalled for being used as weapons to destroy an adversary, actually became instrumental in disgracing and finally annihilating him.

On their return to the valley, the Sayids, notably Meya Mohammed and Nasir, lost no time in rehabilitating their prestige and in regaining their old power. Having ingratiated themselves with the king, they gradually, under one pretext or another, ousted ministers, officials and nobles with broad views and patriotic feelings from the administration. Mera Mukhat assisted them in the execution of this policy. General Tazi Bhatt was the main target of their redicule and wrath. He was humiliated and, but for his uncommon popularity, would have been sacked long before he was finally pounced upon.

Securely entrenched in power, the Sayids turned their attention to displacing Malik Ahmad from his exalted position. He was charged with disloyalty and unfriendliness. And before he could meet the unfounded accusations or even guess the intentions of his prosecutors, the imprudent politician found himself lodged in a dingy cell of a horrible prison. His wife and children were tortured and his property plundered.

Jehangir Magre, another military commander with pronounced nationalist views, was harassed, but he was a hard nut to crack; he curried favour with the king. He was commissioned to subdue rebellious Baltistan but was disallowed to take troops on the expedition which he needed to end the operations in victory. Not unexpectedly the poor commander met with a

disaster. It was certain that on his return he would be punished for the failure and probably beheaded. Jehangir Magre saw his safety in running away to foreign lands but, before doing, so he came in disguise and arranged an audience with the king. Srivara, the contemporary historian, writes that in this interview Jehangir sincerely advised Hassan Shah and appealed to him in these impassioned words ; "You have brought this curse (the rule of Sayids) upon this peaceful country. As the grandson of King Zain-ul-abidin you have a right to the kingdom but as his daughter's son, Meya Mohammed, also has a similar claim on the country. The Sayids have further been encouraged by the Turushakas (Muslim kings of Delhi) with hopes of support. Such are the Sayids and they should always be feared. They are even eager for the kingdom as vultures are for the meat. All your work will be accomplished if you avoid placing yourself under the influence of your wife. Do not, therefore, O master, be influenced by your spouse. I am going away for the safety of your kingdom as well as of myself. The country is ruined and you ought to save yourself somehow."[6]

These outspoken observations of a faithful servant temporarily awakened Hassan Shah and he assured Jehangir that in future no laziness would prevent him from taking the necessary precautions. But this was easily said than done. The king was no more an independent man; he was a prisoner of Mera Mukhat and a plaything in the hands of the Sayids. No sooner was Jehangir's back turned than Mohammed Shah unreservedly told all about the interview to the queen who, a partisan of the Sayids, "became enraged and, like a fearful she serpent, sought to injure the Margapati (Jehangir Magre)".[7] But the patriot had by then crossed the border and gone, along with his loyal troops, beyond her reach. From his refuge in a foreign land Jehangir addressed another warning in a written confidential message to the king with no better result. Hassan Shah passed it on to the Sayids who only swore vengence on the sender.

With the disappearance of Jehangir, the last of the nationalist-minded formidable nobles, the Sayids were in full control of the administrative machinery. Mera Mukhat was their chief adviser ; poor Hassan Shah was reduced to the position of a non-entity, a figure head, a tool or an onlooker whose opinion

6. Ibid., Vol. III, P. 254.
7. Ibid., Vol. III, P. 257.

was never sought or, when voluntarily given, mostly ignored. He lost all interest in the government. "The king remained indifferent to the doings of his servants," says Srivara, "his mind was influended by his wife and the Sayids, and his own acts became disorderly and reprehensible. When the people saw the kingdom of their sovereign under the influence of women they felt grieved and quoted the following saying : 'They perish who have no leader ; they too perish whose leader is an infant, and they also perish whose leader is a woman and those who have many leaders perish likewise.' "[8]

After consultations with the queen, Sayid Hassan assumed the responsibilities of the Prime Minister and the key posts in the administration were bestowed upon other members of the Sayid family. Big and small jagirs were granted to relatives and dependents in accordance with their rank and degree of loyalty. Wealth in the treasury was spent on vain entertainments and attainment of private ends. In utter disregard of time-honoured traditions and popular sentiments the new rulers behaved like barbarians and not infrequently wounded the susceptibilities of the people. Kashmiris of all classes, castes and creeds were treated contemptuously and harshly not as human beings but as animals or as Srivara puts it "as grass". Possibly the Hindus suffered more heavily but the Muslims were not spared the injustice and humiliation which sprang from racial animosity than religious differences. Therefore the resentment was not confined to any particular community and disaffection was wide-spread. Murmurs of rebellion were increasingly heard in the capital and other big towns in the vallev. A gigantic rising was in the offing.

The disaffected Kashmir notables including Jehangir Magre had no plan nor any intention of overthrowing the royal power ; they were loyal to the king and his family. Their sole aim was to depose the alien Sayids from seats of authority and turn them out from the land which they had desecrated with their impious deeds. Time and again the Kashmiri leaders warned Hassan Shah and painted lurid picture of the impending ruin in case he hesitated to move and let matters drift on. On one occasion it appeared that the indolent king realised his mistakes and wanted to drive out the Sayids and restore the administration to the Kashmiris. But he was a weakling and it was beyond the

8. Ibid., Vol. III, P. 256-257.

power of his will to shake off the vicious influence of the crafty and dominating Mera Mukhat.

The intemperate habits and immoderate living which Hassan Shah adopted in his declining age crippled him physically and mentally. The insecurity of the regime caused by the constant quarrels of the warring courtiers added to his distractions. He fell seriously ill and remained bed-ridden for several months. When he guessed that he was not to survive for many more days he summoned the prominent Sayid nobles and expressed his last desire to them in presence of his wife. He said : "Bring the son of Adam Khan by some artifice and coronate him : or do as your daughter, the queen, advises."[9] Adam Khan was the eldest son of Bud Shah. His son Fath Shah was reported to be endowed with many good qualities while Hassan Shah's own son, Mohammed Shah, was only six year old and, therefore, unfit to be on the throne of an internally disturbed kingdom. It was clear that the dying king was solicitous about the future welfare of his country which he could not help mismanaging in his lifetime.

Miraculously, the words of the king produced a wholesome effect on the mind of Mera Mukhat and wrought a change in her thinking. Thenceforth she refused to be a tool in the hands of the Sayids for the fulfilment of their ambitions and thought of the good of her people. She was prepared to forego the claims of her infant son in order to preserve the stability of the State. She told her father, Sayid Hassan, the Prime Minister : "It is doubtful if the king will live. What should be done now about the kingdom. Rather coronate the youthful son of Baharam Khan and make your eldest grandson the heir-apparent."[10] Yusuf Khan the unfortunate prince whom the queen preferred over her son for the rulership was languishing in prison where he had been lodged for no fault of his. He was acknowledged, by friend and foe alike, as the fittest candidate for the crown but Hassan Shah, his queen and the Sayids disliked him for his talents and virtues. The fact that Mera Mukhat, in the hour of her country's need, disregarding her animosity and prejudice, boldly suggested to release the prince and coronate him was praiseworthy, but the Sayids put forth innumerable obstacles one of which she could not remove from her path. She was told that according to the Islamic Law of Succession Yusaf Khan could not

9. Ibid., Vol. III. P. 622.
10. Ibid., Vol. III, P. 263.

succeed to the throne; the injunction of Shariat is the last thing that a God-fearing, pious, Muslim lady dare challenge.

Hassan Shah died in April 1484 A.D. The over-ambitious but short sighted Sayids manoeuvred to place their infant nephew, Mohammad Khan, on the throne in the hope that by doing so they could do what they desired unchecked. The sensible plan of Mera Mukhat to crown Yusaf Khan was astutely foiled. With renewed zeal and redoubled vigour the Sayids victimised their opponents and persecuted every one who pointed out defects in the administration or lamented over the miseries of the people. It drew patriotic Kashmiri nobles to desperation and exacerbated the feelings of the harassed populace. Within a few weeks of Mohammed Shah's accession disturbances broke out in the capital which spread rapidly to other parts of the land. Soon they assumed the form of a destructive civil war.

Being in charge of the government and patronised by the Royal House, the Sayids could hire certain opportunist courtiers and recruit an army which was paid out of state coffers. But the Kashmiris who hated foreign domination and detested Sayids rallied round the leaders of the opposition. Among the anti-government forces were freedom-loving patriots, disgruntled nobles, humiliated army commanders and also self-seekers. None nursed any grievance against the boy-king, Mohammad Shah; the Sayids were their common anathema. But since the king was incapable of deciding for himself and was put up as a symbol of their power by the Sayids, the insurrectionary forces invited Fath Khan who was in exile, to lead them. That prince unhesitatingly hurried to the side of his countrymen which ignited the combustible situation. The civil war lasted many years and was fought spasmodically; it caused immense misery and undermined the rule which had been firmly established by the wise measures of Bud Shah.

It is not within the province of the present work to narrate the vicissitudes through which the struggle passed in those long and gloomy days. But it is interesting to note that Mera Mukhat did not impassively watch the grim rebellion nor remain unaffected by the hardships and suffering which the people had to undergo. With a lacerated heart she witnessed the ruin in which the royal dynasty was involved; increasingly she realised that her father and other Sayids were not moved by good intentions in what they did; she felt convinced more than ever that if an old

prince with mature mind and developed intellect had been placed on the throne instead of her infant son probably the country would have been spared the civil war which was claiming a heavy toll of life on both sides and devastating the land. She intended to move again and bring the hostilities to a close but, alas, the time for it had already passed and it was not within her power to undo the mischief that had been done with her connivance. At that critical juncture the Sayids were deadly opposed to replace Mohammad Shah and concede moral victory to the rebels. But Mera Mukhat would not be held back. Acting courageously, almost perilously, she got Yusuf Khan released from imprisonment. She had resolved to make a gesture of goodwill to win at least a section of the enemy. It was her intention to crown the liberated prince and pave the way for reconciliation with displeased grandees and nobles; her ultimate aim was restoration of peace and tranquillity in the land. But the treacherous Sayids once again frustrated her plans. Getting timely information of the move they got the wretched prince dastardly assassinated by one Ali Khan before he had proceeded a few paces from the place of his incarceration. Yusuf Khan was quite young at the time of his death. "The widowed and chaste mother of the prince, Lady Sobana, lived on bare meal and to the end of her life resided in the tomb of her son."[11]

With the brutal murder of Yusuf Khan died all the hopes of Mera Mukhat. She was upset and thoroughly distrustful of the Sayids. Her lingering faith in the nobility of her father was shattered. Broken-hearted and helpless she retired from politics and all public activities. We do not find her name mentioned after the incident by court historians ; nor is it known when she died; so totally indifferent had she become to the affairs of the world.

11. Ibid. Vol. III, P. 276.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HABBA : SONGSTRESS BECOMES QUEEN

THE last of the Muslim queens to achieve renown was Habba Khatun, the sweet-throated spouse of King Yusuf Shah Chak who ruled Kashmir twice, first in 1578 A.D. for only a few months and, a second time, from 1579 A.D. to 1587 A.D. Her reputation rests on her cultural attainments. Unlike her predecessors in the Temple of Fame, Habba evinced no interest in the affairs of state, raised no material monuments and constructed no public buildings. She was ignorant of politics even though her homeland was shaken by many political upheavals which ended in enslavement of the Kashmiris and ruin to herself. She was a poet and singing was her passion ; she loved and lived in a world of her own in which there was little room for riches and power.

Habba's original name was Zoon. Born of a poor peasant family in the village Chandahar, near Pampore, she had grown into a charming rustic belle and became a cynosure of the eyes of romantic young men all around. From her childhood she delighted in reciting the musical compositions of the great poets of the valley. And while in her teens she surprised the peasant women no less than the village elders by composing lyrics in Kashmiri language which were faultless in technique as they were sound in imagery. Before long even those whose judgment carried weight declared her to be a born poet. The complimentary observations encouraged the parents to put Zoon in a school where she read a few books in Persian like *Gulistan* and *Bostan*. She also studied the holy Quran. The exquisite poetry of Saadi sharpened her wits and generated in her greater zest for singing and composing rhymes. But while she

was making these brilliant beginnings of a promising career the parents unhappily married her to a typical village bumpkin who felt ashamed to know that his wife could compose lyrics and was admired by rural folk for melodious singing. She was imperiously forbidden to indulge in these "engagements of the vulgar and dissolute". Her husband and his parents made no secret of their view that the daughter-in-law should behave like other gentle and humble girls of respectable families in the countryside. But Zoon's muse was irrepressibie ; her intellect illuminating, her personality scintillating and her beauty sparkling. She has enshrined the memory of these dark days in a moving stanza :

"I left my home for play but returned not when the day sank in tho West.
I came of noble parentage and made name as Habba Khatun.
I passed through crowds drawing tight my veil
But people flocked to see me
And ascetics hurried out of woods
When the day sank in the West."

The budding poetess needed free atmosphere to unfold her latent gifts but her husband's home was ill suited for that purpose. While passing through a period of physical torture and acute mental agony, she was, one day, outwardly collecting flowers in a saffron field but in reality deeply absorbed in singing a musical note newly composed by herself. At the same time Prince Yusuf Khan, heir-apparent to the throne of Kashmir, was passing nearby, probably out on a hunting trip. The intensity of emotion expressed in the song and sweetness of the sound enthralled the prince who was no mean lover of music and poetry. He insisted on meeting the charming songstress and her first sight captivated his heart. Yusuf Khan was deep in love with Zoon and he asseverated to make her his bride. It was not difficult peacefully to secure her divorce and the poorly apparelled peasant woman working in the fields soon adorned the royal palace as the beloved princess of Yusuf Khan. Habba was hardly twenty years old when fortune smiled on her in a twinkling of eye.

For the next fourteen years Habba enjoyed the amenities and benefits of royal life. Yusuf was a kind hearted prince who took great pleasure in allowing his talented spouse to freely exercise the hidden powers of her spirit. This was the happiest period of Habba's life in which she came into her own and attained the lofty heights of her cultural ideals. With a husband-

king to appreciate her talent and beauty, and, with fullest freedom to do as she desired, Habba's originality fructified and gave birth to those literary gems which have shone brighter with the passage of every century after her days.

Habba Khatun composed scores of songs many of which are extant. She perfected the lol lyric peculiar to Kashmir poetry. She was a musician who, by inventing the *Rast Raga*, made a new addition to the known ragas of that time. The connoisseur of the days readily acknowledged her gifts. Her fame as poetess and musician travelled far and wide.

But the felicity did not last till the end of Habba's life. Rainy days were in store for the artiste-queen. After making some unsuccessful attempts, Akbar finally triumphed in 1586 A.D. in annexing Kashmir to the Mughal empire. Poor Yusuf Khan was treacherously taken prisoner, deposed and sent to Bihar as a provincial subedar. He implored the emperor for permission to return to his country of birth but was curtly refused that concession. What prevented Habba from joining her beloved husband at his gubernatorial post in Bihar ? Was it that Akbar forbade the union or did Habba decline to leave her homeland? History is silent on this point and the inquisitive student is left to find an answer in surmises.

Nevertheless, whatever the reason, the everlasting separation from the object of her affections caused unendurable pain to innocent Habba ; she became almost mad with grief. But the intensity of ruffled emotions lent additional beauty to her poetry and charm to her songs. World and its pleasures had lost all interest and attraction for her. She left the palace, abandoned her home and wandered about endlessly through Kashmir, in its hills and dales, in riversides and lakes, in forests and valleys, in villages and towns, singing of life and beauties of nature with one burden of her songs :

"Say friend, when will fate smile on me
And my love come to me again ? Say When ?
I have waited long and patiently,
My heart is numb and idle and empty of hopes.
Sweet is the ritual of love
I would deck my love with ornament,
And in henna dye my hands.
I would annoint his body with fragrant kisses
And offer him wine in golden goblets
The lotus of love which blooms in the lake of my heart,
Say, friend, when will fate smile on me ?

Go forth and call him, friend,
I've made posies of flowers for him,
Over passes high I carried him wine,
But he is roaming among distant glades ?
O, why is he roaming in far-off glades ?
O, where is he drunk with my rival's wine ?
In his absence like jesmine I will fade;
I've made posies of flowers for him."

By degrees her wailings became pathetic, her agonies piercing. She moaned :

"Love has consumed me from within
He has cast me into a hot oven
And is burning me to cinder.

"Love has melted me like the snow
He has fretted me like the hill stream
And has made me restless like the rills."

"The world observes the Ramzan
The lover celebrates the 'Id
But there can be no 'Id when the love is away."

Addressing the idol of her worship, she sang :

"In henna I dyed my hands
When will he come
It's love should come to me, bedecked.
Come still my craving
I am dying for thee :
Without thee how shall I fill my days ?
I cannot endure separation from thee."

Sultan Yusaf Shah Chak was a great lover of nature and enjoyer of life. Whether as prince or as ruler he spent most of his time in the countryside admiring scenic beauties and colourful glories with which Kashmir Valley abounds. His favourite resort was Gulmarg and indeed it is said that he changed the name of this world famous hilly abode from Gaurimarg (Meadow of Parvati) to Gulmarg (Meadow of Flowers). The king was in the habit of spending the entire summer season in company of his charming consort at the lovely hill station. Remembering this Habba sang in a plaintive strain :

"The distant meadows are in bloom
Hast thou not heard my plaint
Flowers bloom on the mountain lakes
Come let us to mountain meads;
The lilac blooms in distant woods
Hast thou not heard my plaint ?

Poor Habba was not conversant with politics and could hardly comprehend the change that had come over Kashmir by its annexation to the Mughal Empire. She had only a faint idea of the misfortune that had overtaken Yusuf Shah. The reasons that prevented her beloved husband to return and meet her again were beyond the power of her understanding. What harm did it do anyone, she thought, that two souls loved each other and wanted to be together. The closing days of her life were full of sorrow and suffering. Some time she is reported to have spent in the valley of Gurez where the people respected her. A local hill on which she was often seen singing her melodious lyrics is still called Habbabal (Hill of Habba) in her name. But she was restless and could not stay at one place. Distraction drove her from one corner to another in search of her lost sweet-heart who was to be found nowhere. Disillusioned, frustrated and exhausted Habba finally set up a small cottage on the spur of a mountain near Panta Chhuk. Here she passed her last moments and here she lies buried in a humble grave, an eternally blooming flower of Kashmir culture, the last queen of our independent homeland.

Not all that Habba composed and sang has survived to this day. It is said that her productions were voluminous; only the songs that caught the imagination of the romantic classes of Kashmiris and became popular, have been preserved; the major portion has disappeared. That is hardly surprising if we remember that since 1586 A.D. Kashmir has been in enslavement and the Kashmir literature has heavily suffered destruction through the deliberate hostility of foreign rulers whether they were Mughals, Pathans, Sikhs or Dogras.

With the rise of modern nationalist movement in the valley the patriotic and educated Kashmiris have started a search to salvage the old literature from the debris. Some gems of Habba's songs have been unearthed and published. An increasing number of people are relishing her melodies and symphonies; her invaluable contribution to Kashmiri literature is freely recognised. When Sheikh Abdullah was the Prime Minister of Kashmir, Habba's memory was revived and a day celebrated in her honour in 1952 A.D. The Kashmir Government got her grave repaired and a small grassy plot with flower beds was planted round it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SOME REMARKABLE FIGURES

THOSE queens and ladies of royal blood who were precluded from taking part in politics or governmental activities under the Muslim rule but cherished ardent desire to serve the country, bended their energies in constructing buildings of religious significance or public utility thus continuing the traditions of the Hindu queens of earlier ages. We may briefly state the doings of the notable among them.

(1) Shri Khatun

In his charitable and religious works King Zain-ul-abidin is reported to have been assisted by his renowned queen, Shri Khatun, who incessantly gratified the people with food and patronised them in other ways.[1] The great king held his spouse in high esteem and valued her views. It is said that the construction of many mosques, khanqahs and madrassas was inspired by her.

(2) Bhombra Khatun

King Hassan Shah outdid the most dissolute of the Kashmir monarchs in increasing the number of inmates of his seraglio. He owned an army of concubines numbering several hundred. Some of them were really good women and utilised the opportunity of royal association for the uplift of the fallen and the indigent. Out of the lawfully wedded queens, Mera Mukhat, besides evincing deep interest in politics and administration, engaged herself in other activities of public welfare. Radiant with wealth she renovated a mosque at Mrigvata which had

1. *Kings of Kashmira*, Vol., III, P. 142.

been burned down. Other queens of Hassan Shah, free from the cares of state, directed their entire attention towards such undertakings. Bhombra Khatun built a new magnificent matha at Zainanagar near the palace with her own savings. Princess Jayarala born of the royal family constructed a huge khanqah on one side of Sikandarpura, a satellite town in the capital.[2]

(3) Begum Saliha

In the course of the civil war which broke out soon after Mohammed Shah's installation on the throne, Khanqah Shah Hamdan had become the rendezvous of pro-government faction. The partisans of Sayids used to meet in its premises to chalk out their plans for the suppression and annihilation of the insurgent forces. Enraged by this misuse of the sacred edifice a section of the more zealous but less discreet Muslim patriots burned down the khanqah to express their disgust and resentment against the Sayid administration ; love of homeland had taken precedence over esteem for religion. The khanqah stood in a half burnt and dilapidated condition because the internecine civil war continued furiously for many years : Mohammed Shah and Fath Shah defeated each other several times. Finally, when comparative calm was restored and Mohammed Shah had captured power for the third time, his queen Saliha rebuilt the shrine. The undertaking was an outcome of her unbounded reverence for the great savant and missionary in whose memory the edifice had been raised. Saliha sold her own jewellery and from the sale proceeds accomplished the work. She did not approach the king for any financial help as such a step would have diminished, in her eyes, the merit of the deed ; she refused to accept a single *dinar* from the state coffers which were opened to her for the noble purpose. The world-renowned Khanqah of Shah Hamdan on the bank of the Vitasta just below Fateh Kadal (Third Bridge) as it magnificently stands today—the precious specimen of medieval Muslim architecture—is the gift of the generous queen Saliha.

(4) Lachhma

In the sphere of social service and religious worship, ladies of aristocratic families vied with the queens in selfless work. Lachhma, the pious daughter of General Saif-Dar, who was

2. Ibid., P. 227.

married to Malik Jalal-ud-din, a minister of Bud Shah, was known for her learning and charity. She founded a madrassa where sons and daughters of noblemen were taught Islamic literature and educated in Persian. She also erected a hospice near the Jama Masjid in the Gojwara mohalla for the benefit of scholars and God-fearing people. To keep both the public centres adequately supplied with water, the munificent lady got an aqueduct constructed at a huge expense from distant Lar. It was called Lachhma Kuhl in her name. The hospice may still be seen in the shape of ziarat now known as Masjid-i-Qaza, but the school after a chequered career lasting years was closed for lack of good management.[3] It is notable that though Lachhma was a devoted lady who had dedicated her life to the service of Islam she found, like several other Muslim ladies, pleasure in retaining her Hindu name.

(5) Zoon Ded and Zai Ded

Zoon Ded and Zai Ded, mother and wife respectively of the celebrated Nund Rishi, were women of stirling and powerful character who helped the patron saint of the valley in his historic mission of spreading Religious Humanism. Zai Ded was a poet. Her songs and sayings are popular among the Kashmiri peasantry.

(6) Vyath and Dehat

Among the lady disciples of Nund Rishi who have left a mark on the contemporary cultural development, were Vyath and Dehat, whom people reverentially called Chat Ded (Disciple Mothers). They too spent their lives profitably in teaching and practising the philosophy of their master ; particularly enthusiastic was Vyath who was fired with the spirit of an inspired missionary and initiated hundreds of women in the secrets of the new faith. Her name was Vyath (Vitasta in Kashmiri dialect) which meant pure as water. She was fairly acquainted with Arabic, Persian and Kashmiri literatures. Her discourses are reported to have been scholarly, incisive and inspiring. Even today educated Kashmiris quote her sayings in their daily conversation[4]

3. *Kashir* by G.M.D. Sufi, Vol II, P. 389.
4. Ibid., Vol. II, P. 388.

(7) Shaha Bibi

A noble, though unfortunate, lady was Shaha Bibi wife of Malik Ahmad, the first Prime Minister of Hassan Shah. She too was of a religious bent of mind and felt unhappy if she was unable to do a good turn to some needy man or woman on any day. Her charities were widely appreciated. During the days of her husband's glory she constructed a big edifice for the purpose of religious celebrations on the road to Kheri. She was overwhelmed with joy on its completion and distributed alms on a large scale. Her humanitarian activities came to a sudden end when, under the evil influence of the Sayids, Malik Ahmed and his sons were thrown into prison. Shaha displayed an uncommon power of endurance and patience in the days of misfortune. She maintained calm and befriended the victims of the tyrannical regime. The wretched prisoners were tortured to pay huge sums and the selfless lady deprived herself of all valuables to alleviate the miseries of her dearest and nearest. But still the foreigners in power would not release them. Malik Ahmad was unable to stand the severe rigours which he had to undergo and consequently died while a prisoner. The blow proved too heavy for the good Shaha ; she could not survive the calamity and followed her husband in death soon after.

(8) Sahiba Nishawan

Some Kashmiri women flourised at the court of the Mughals. The close contact of the Mughal grandees with Kashmir, after the annexation of the valley, made them familiar with the lovely physical appearance of Kashmiri girls. Dr. Bernier who visited the valley as a member of Emperor Aurangzeb's entourage states in his book that every Mughal noble used to marry at least one Kashmiri woman to have beautiful progeny. Thus were the Kashmiri women introduced into the zenana of the Mughlas. While large majority of them was destined to remain in the position of mistresses and concubines for which they were meant, a lucky few gifted with intelligence, initiative and pluck, slowly rose to a higher status and distinguished themselves within the domestic sphere and occasionally beyond it.

Sahiba Nishawan, grandmother of Emperor Farrukh Siyar, was a Kashmiri. She was a sister of Khwaja Inayat Ullah who had, as a reward for his services, earned the title of Shaista Khan. She exerted much influence at the court and played a cons-

picuous part in directing the destinies of her motherland for a period. It was probably through her recommendation and support that Khwaja Inayat Ullah rose to the pinnacle of glory never attained by any other Kashmiri in the days of Mughals ; he was appointed the subedar of the valley besides being a courtier of distinction at Delhi.

(9) Hafiza Maryam

Hafiza Maryam, wife of Mirza Shakur Ullah of Kashmir, was a woman who had the good fortune of receiving liberal education when quite young. She had attained proficiency in the languages spoken and used by the learned classes. She knew Persian and Arabic thoroughly well and had learnt the holy Quran by rote. In flawless Persian she could discuss any topic on religion or literature like a scholar. It is said that her discourses on controversial themes attracted educated men and women who heard her with respect, admiration and attention. For her attainments she was held in reverence at the Mughal court. Emperor Aurangzeb, by no means a critic of low standard in estimating virtues of women, was impressed by the literary taste and erudition of Hafiza Maryam. He reposed enough confidence in the nobility of her character to entrust the upbringing of his beloved daughter, Zeb-un-nissa, to her care. The princess owed her education to the Kashmiri lady and as is clear from certain preserved letters of Zeb-un-nissa, she remained indebted to Hafiza Maryam throughout her life.

Hafiza Maryam died in 1678 A.D. and was buried, in accordance with her desire, in the enclosure of Sheikh Baha-ud-din Ganj Baksh outside the Kathidarwaza Gate of the high rampart around Hari Parbat.

(10) Hafiza Khadija

Yet another lady of learning was Hafiza Khadija, daughter of Mir Sayid Abdul Fattah. The liberal-minded father took sufficient pains to educate the precocious daughter. While in her teens, Khadija studied and mastered the Quran, the Hadith, the Fiqah besides big volumes on Dinyat and Arabic and Persian literatures. Then she was given in marriage to an equally great scholar, Mulla Zain-ud-din Mufti. The union sharpened her wits and whetted her zest for imparting literacy and education to the women of her homeland. She used to invite intelligent girls to

her private room but when, with the rapid rise in the number of students, it became unmanageable to conduct the class, she started a school in a part of her spacious house which remained in existence till she lived. Hundreds of girls were educated in this institution which was the only one of its kind in existence during those days. Hafiza Khadija died in 1739 A.D. at the age of sixty and many eyes shed tears at the time of burial of the benefactress.

(11) Tara and Utsava

Some Muslim kings of Kashmir were patrons of singing and dancing and their courts used to be crowded with artistes. It is said of Sultan Hassan Shah that he had hundreds of musicians and dancers employed permanently. The scenic beauties in which Kashmir abounds inspire even the dull-witted with finer sentiments. Besides, the ancient traditions of dancing and singing lingered on in the memory of people throughout the dark period of bad rule, instability and upheavals. When good government was restored and normalcy returned to the land, the artistic activities too were revived. The first Muslim monarch to encourage cultural resurgence was Zain-ul-abidin. In his time there were many women artistes two of whom, Tara and Utsava, were renowned. Bud Shah's adoration for Islam did not prevent him from inviting the artistes to give demonstrations of their talent and skill in the Audience Hall where the state functionaries and the elite assembled to witness them. Historian Srivara, himself a reputable singer in the employ of the monarch, has recorded one of these concerts held inside the Royal Palace at Vijayeshwara (Vijbror). He writes: "The spectators and singers knew literature, rhetoric and philosophy and appreciated merit. Young women proficient in music, possessessed of sweet voice, and with a genuine ardour for song, graced the place. The men were learned and dignified and fond of enjoyment, and they displayed their taste and their intelligence on the stage. The renowned Tara and the actors sang various songs to the *Naracha* tune and to every kind of music. And the songstress Utsava who was even like cupid's arrow, charming to the eye and proficient in dance, both swift and slow, entranced everybody. The actress who played forty-nine different emotions seemed even like the ascending and descending notes of music personified. As they danced and sang, the eye and the ear of the audience seemed to contend for the keenest enjoyment. The

scene was indeed beautiful, the songs of the actresses were like the voice of the kokila, the stage was like a garden where the lamps on it looked like roses of the champka flower and around them were men intoxicated with wine, like bees around flowers."[5]

(12) Ratnamala, Dipamala and Nripamala

In Hassan Shah's days, Kashmir became the pleasure house of the professional artiste. The king was not content with rewarding them when pleased with their exquisite performances. He issued orders for payment of regular salaries to as many of them as were to his liking. And there were no fewer than 1200 big and small musicians, singers and dancers on the approved list. One of the causes that contributed to the ruin of the sultan was lavish squandering of wealth from state coffers over the fleet of artistes. Women formed a battalion of this army of joy-givers and at any rate a few of them radiated brilliance to catch the eye of our connoisseur-historian. The more known of them were Ratnamala, Dipamala and Nripamala. They were always in demand on days of merry-making. Hassan Shah, his political short sightedness and imprudence apart, has been acknowledged as one well-informed on subjects of fine art. He could easily discriminate between good and bad performances. He had nothing but high praise for the three danseuses. He derived a special pleasure by their display and felt bewitched after every concert. We can do no better to describe their talents than by quoting Srivara again :

> "The female dancers of the king shone beauteously and bright like the lamps at night ; they were inflamed by the god of love and were young and full of emotion, even as the lamps were fed by wax, and were new and supplied with wick. The female dancers Ratnamala, Dipamala and Nripamala danced charmingly displaying emotions and gestures. The king praised the beautiful actress Ratnamala, her forehead marked with *Tilaka*, and he praised her dancing and owned that she had melted the hearts of all by her steps and her tremor and her action. How she commenced the expected dance !"

The historian was no less enraptured than King Hassan Shah by the performances of the dancing girls. Proceeding he adds :

> "Ratnamala's gestures, her movements, the expression of her passions, and the swelling song which flowed incessantly from her throat inflamed all men ! The vaunt of the skillful is worthless as straw in comparison with her. Possessed of loveliness and famed for her beauty, she was the renovator of men. Her song was without a fault, her person was decorated with jewels, her beauty was great

5. *Kings of Kashmira*, Vol. III, Pp. 131-132

and she was possessed of merit. The creator made her face like the full moon, and out of portion of nectar (of which moon was made). The beauty of her face was nectar, and a drop of nectar hung from her nose in the form of a pearl pendant. The pearls which hung interwoven in the locks of hair and which fell on the cheeks of the women were looked upon by the king as drops of nectar melting away from their moonlike faces. Thus the youthful king praised the women in presence of his boon companions, and took cups of wine from them."[6]

It is a pity that no treatise was written on the fine arts as they were taught and practised in the medieval Kashmir nor have any records been preserved of the lives of outstanding artistes beyond what has been sketchily stated by Srivara in his *Rajvalipataka*. It is inconceivable that artistes like Tara, Utsava and Ratnamala could have sprung to life and achieved such mastery over the art and prominence in the professions of singing and dancing unless they were brought up in a congenial atmosphere conducive to the growth of the artistic talent and trained in art institutions maintaining high standards. But whatever the progress in the days of the sultans it did not last long. With the downfall of the Chak rule in 1586 A.D. the Kashmiris lost their independence and the tempo of cultural activities slowed down.

(13) Rupa Bhawani

About the time when the Mughals annexed Kashmir to their empire; there lived in the valley one Madho Dhar, a Pandit imbued with deep religious spirit. A girl, angelic in appearance, was born to him in 1624 A.D., and he thought the baby was an incarnation of the goddess, Sharika, the presiding deity of Hari Parbat, the sacred hill near the city, to circumambulate which every morning the devoted Madho Dhar, like all religious-minded Pandits, reckoned one of his primary duties. The heavenly daughter was named Rwaff (Sanskrit Rupa).

Madho Dhar, besides being a passionate devotee, was a scholar who had studied the scriptures and acquired some knowledge of Hindu philosophy. He was acquainted with the fundamentals of Shaivism. He also loved the company of mystics, saints and anchorites. His best spiritual associate was Rahbab Sahib, a Muslim faqir, whose masoleum stands at Ganz Khud in Srinagar. It was from her father that Rwaff learned the rudiments of learning and mysticism during the days of nonage.

6. Ibid., Vol. III; Pp. 231-232.

But Madho Dhar was a man of the world too. The evil custom of child marriage had already taken roots in the valley. Before Rwaff had seen ten summers (some say when she was hardly seven years old), she was married to a boy of the Sapru family of equal tender age. Unhappily the union proved ill-starred and the child-bride had to undergo hardships in the house of her husband. Many are the painful tales narrated to this day of the troubles the harsh mother-in-law gave her. Generally, she was reprimanded for insufficient gifts her parents sent on ceremonial days. Patiently she endured the disgrace, abuses and cruelties. But the thrusts of the venomous tongue were unending and enough to break even her uncommon fortitude. Unable to withstand any more Rwaff renounced the wordly life, assumed saffron-coloured robes and took to making religious experiments.

The first to initiate Rwaff into spiritual life was her father. Zestfully she learned whatever Madho Dhar had to teach her but thirst for knowledge remained unquenched. She studied Yoga, Vedanta and various other doctrines taught by contemporary religious leaders. The teachings of Lal Ded were her favourite subject which she imbibed with special care. Having completed a study of the vast literature, she met many savants and philosophers to ascertain the soundness of the conclusions at which she had arrived. Next she wandered in quest of hidden mystery in the countryside interviewing yogis and sadhus, faqirs and darveshes. At the same time, she resorted to ascetic and esoteric practices under expert guidance at Chashma Sahibi, Utshan, Manigam, Iar and Vasukur.

When Rwaff had already spent many years of her life in search of fundamental truths, one day she accidently met, at Lar, Shah Sadiq Qalandar, a Sufi saint. In the brief talk which the two had on essence of religion and strivings of the soul they were convinced that their continued association would be mutually helpful. And this proved to be a wise decision. Some accounts of discourses between the two abounding in witticism and intellectual repartees are current among her admirers. It is said that they frequently tested each other to find lest either or both swerved from the right course. Qalandar was a Muslim faqir with ample religious experience. Regular discussions enriched the mind of Rwaff just as it did that of Qalandar himself. Her thoughts matured, her outlook broadened and she rose higher discarding the prejudices of caste and religion. Finally,

she achieved the sainthood for which she has been celebrated by her countrymen during the past three centuries as Rupa Bhawani. She gave up wandering and made Vasukur her permanent residence where she lived till the venerable age of 96. From this hamlet she preached sermons, ideas and ideals to an ever-growing number of her devotees in the valley. Qalandar who survived her has recorded the date of her death in a Persian chronogram as a mark of his regard and admiration for the saint.

The teachings of Rupa Bhawani are not much known. Most of what she said has either not been recorded or has disappeared with passage of time. Besides her mother tongue, Kashmiri, she could speak both Sanskrit and Persian. At times she could also versify. In a printed booklet entitled *Devi Pooja*, Kesho Bhatt has preserved some of her sayings in Sanskrit. A letter in Persian rhyme addressed to her first disciple and a leaflet purporting to be a report of a discourse with Shah Qalandar have been published. That is the scanty material on which we have to draw for our guidance. There are innumerable legends, miracles, aphorisms and anecdotes associated with Rupa Bhawani's life and related by old Pandit women. No one can say how far they are based on facts.

It is difficult to translate or understand the sayings of Rupa Bhawani; the language is archaic; there are double and occasionally more meanings to what she said. The expressions are obscure, unintelligible, mystical and esoteric. A modern critic has called the sayings abracadabra, perhaps in dismay. Her devotees, afraid to incur the saint's displeasure, refuse to explain the sacred secrets; probably they themselves know precious little of what they recite or contemplate in blind admiration. Nevertheless, it may safely be stated that Rupa Bhawani's philosophy was not very different from that of Lalla to whom she frequently alludes with obvious approval and respect.

Rupa Bhawani was more of a religious reformer than a philosopher. She forbids use of liquor, animal sacrifice, wearing of amulets, poligamy and mendicancy. She has faith in Supreme Lord as the Sole Master of all creation. Different religions are diverse ways through which we can know Him. The differences of race and creed are ephemeral; one should rise above them to achieve the highest good in life. On the whole, Rupa Bhawani upheld the banner of Religious Humanism. She is opposed

to performance of miracles and while a child she is said to have taken exception to such a practice by a renowned ascetic, Reshi Peer, when she visited him in company with her parents.

Rupa Bhawani's first disciple was her nephew, Bala Dhar. Even during her lifetime many other members of the family accepted her spiritual hegemony. She was revered as a manifestation of Goddess Sharika. Since the day of her passing away the descendants of Madho Dhar have observed, without break, her death anniversary when hundreds of admirers participate in religious rituals. She is known among her followers by the respectful appellation of Alakeshwari Sahiba and those among the Dhars who adore her are called Sahib Dhars. The anniversary falls on seventh day of the dark fortnight in the month of Magh (January) and is called Sahiba Saptami.

It is notable that a faction of Dhars declined to recognise the spiritual greatness of Rupa Bhawani and derided her followers as stupid. They deliberately cooked mutton on Sahiba Saptami and earned the sobriquet of Pakmandi Dhar (Hoof Dhar). It if difficult to judge at this distance of time whether the hostility was born of malice or honest objections to the mystic preachings. The objectors appear to have held some vague rational views. It was from this branch of unbelievers that the great patriots like Birbal Dhar, Mirza Pandit Dhar and Raj Kak Dhar sprang at the close of the Pathan rule. Past three centuries have converted Rupa Bhawani into a legendary figure, a beloved saint and an idol of womenfolk. The two sections of Dhars too have forgotten the chapter of ill-will and every member of the group now looks upon Rupa Bhawani as a patron-saint of the entire family and, indeed, of the community of Pandits who hold her in great reverence.

CHAPTER NINE

TWO BRAVE SOULS

THE process of curtailment of liberties, rights and privileges of women which had started in the fourteenth century at the usurpation of power by Shah Mir was accelerated with the annexation of the valley to the Mughal empire by Akbar. The sultans ruled Kashmir in their own right as independent monarchs ; they had made Kashmir their home and had established close and intimate contacts with the Kashmiris ; they were sincere admirers of the indigenous culture and contributed to its promotion ; they realised that in the last resort the durability of their regime depended on the goodwill of the people. The awareness that popular disaffection would be dangerous compelled the sultans to respect the sentiments of the Kashmiris. Although women, as a rule, were no more coronated or actively associated with the administration nor allowed to dabble in politics or assume leadership of armed forces, yet certain spheres of social activity were open to them under the Shah Miris and the Chaks. But the situation changed when Akbar played a fraud on gullible King Usuf Shah and conquered the valley in 1586 A.D. Thenceforth the country was ruled from Delhi through governors appointed by the suzerain power. It is true that law and order was better maintained under the Mughals than under the Chaks ; the country made some material progress, too, at any rate in the early part of the new regime, but the Mughal satraps lacked personal interest in the advancement of Kashmir culture which was a prominent feature of the policy pursued by the independent Muslim monarchs. The sole concern

of the Mughal subedars was to keep down the people from rising and collect revenue for their masters and gifts for themselves. Jehangir and Shah Jahan passionately loved the land of eternal beauty and made many efforts to alleviate sufferings of the people, but never did they evince interest in the advancement of women. With little time to acquire any knowledge of the glorious past of Kashmiri women, the Mughals treated them as fit only tor bearing progeny or as playthings in the hands of wealthy men. For 166 years that the Mughals held Kashmir under their subjugation the condition of women continued to deteriorate. But worst was yet to come.

Under the Mughals, Kashmiri women no doubt lost the last vestiges of liberty; their rights and privileges were snatched away partly by law but mostly by discouragement and disapproval of the ruling class. Yet, their honour, lives and modesty were, generally speaking, in safe hands. So long as the country yielded to the yoke of the Mughal Emperor, women no less than men could live in peace and carry on unmolested their avocations, one at her home and the other outside in fields, factories or offices. It was dismaying to forget the good old days when a Kashmiri woman had the opportunity to unfold her potentialities and bring into service of her homeland the gifts that she possessed. But conscious of servitude in which the country had been bound, she was helpless and could do nothing but wait for the return of better times.

In 1752 A.D. the Afghan adventurer, Ahmad Shah Abdali, who had already got big chunks from the vast Mughal dominions on its northwest, captured Kashmir. From about the very day of Afghan occupation, the lotus-eaters of Kashmir passed through severest trials and hardships never witnessed by them in their long annals covering thousands of years. The women were the worst sufferers. Horrifying are the tales related of the barbarities which were perpetrated on women whose only fault was that they happened to be handsome in appearance, or graceful in form.

Pathans are a brave, charitable and chivalrous people; they are sensitive and self-respecting; as decendants of the ancient people of Gandhara they had close friendly ties with the Kashmiris for a millennium. The conquest of the valley by Abdali was therefore not unwelcome to most of the Kashmiris who yearned for a change of masters due to the decline of Mughal

power at Delhi and consequent maladministration under the heartless imperialist representatives. But the inhuman behaviour of Pathan governors whom Abdali and his successors deputed to keep Kashmir for glorification of Kabul Royal House, terrified the peace-loving Kashmiris. It is outside the purview of the main topic of this book to expatiate on the various aspects of the Afghan rule ; for our purpose we may only dwell upon the condition of womenfolk. No impartial historian can refrain from observing that most of the Afghan governors brought discredit on the fair and respected name of the Pathans ; the effects of the misrule continue to be felt in the valley even to this day.

Deprived of power, privilege and prestige Kashmiri women still enjoyed, under the Mughals, the liberty to move freely, most of them unveiled. But the lustful Pathans made it impossible for them to maintain the freedom. No handsome virgin or married woman could pass through the streets unmolested. Any Pathan official, high or low, could claim her as his own and, if he did not need her for the satisfaction of carnel desires, would despatch her, as a present, to a relation or a friend in Afghanistan to serve as a concubine. The land of peaceful lotus-eaters was thus robbed of the cream of womanhood ; thousands of comely virgins, gazelle-eyed girls and blonde women with tearful eyes and lacerated hearts were violently torn away from their kith and kin and hurried to Kabul.

To save sisters and daughters from the unholy hands of the cruel masters, the Kashmiris introduced the pernicious system of seclusion, unknown to them before. The practice of wearing veils had been in existence among the upper classes for nearly four centuries but screening women from the gaze of men was now considered insufficient; the effective cure was aloofness, total seclusion. Only decrepit, ugly and haggard crones could be seen outside the precincts of the homes ; others had to remain shut up for their own safety. Within four walls of Hindu homes youny women had to conceal their faces by the sleeves of their long loose gowns (*pherans*) from the gaze of men ; it was known as *nur diun* (concealement by sleeve). Even husbands could not see the faces of, much less talk to, their wives in the presence of others particularly the elder people. Of political necessity were, for the first time in history, the Kashmiri women cribbed, cabined and confined. But the practice that was born of sheer national emergency assumed, in later days and under

better regimes, the form of a propriety, a custom, an observance carrying religious and moral sanctity among both Hindus and Muslims.

To be a domestic drudge tied to the kitchen or to produce children in abundance became the two duties as well as enjoyments of a woman's life.

The confinement of women, forced or voluntary, for decades produced its baneful consquences; the succeeding generations of girls increasingly lost their bodily charms; their intellect rusted and their mental, spiritual and moral capacity was undermined. One who saw their wrecked physiques, gaunt frames and shrunken faces could hardly believe that at one time in the past the female forbears of these women could have commanded troops and led armies on battlefield. Such illiterate, ignorant and punny women would blush to claim Sugandha, Didda, Silā, Kalhanika, Kota, Lalla, Haura and Habba as their ancestresses.

Yet the dying embers occasionally threw out a spark which illuminated the darkness around.

(1) Kudamal

Sardar Mohammed Azim Khan was one of the bigotted and heartless Afghan governors who ruled Kashmir for six years from 1813 to 1819 A. D. Some of his predecessors had disgraced the name of the imperial Afghan power by savagery and brutal behaviour. New taxes were imposed on the impoverished land and, to collect them, ruthless methods of inhuman torture were employed by the rulers. Plunder by alien officers was common; kidnapping of innocent girls almost a daily occurrence; and the people felt exasperated. On assuming the reins of office Azim Khan in no way slackened the extortionist policy; indeed, he added some burdens of his own on the aching shoulders of the Kashmiris. The lawlessness of Afghan mercenaries remained unchecked. Brought to a state of desperation even a worm will turn; the indolent Kashmiris showed signs of restiveness. Instead of alleviating their sufferings and assuaging the pain in their wounded hearts, the governor took steps which added fuel to the fire of discontent. He prosecuted some selected nobles who were known to be bold in the cause of their harassed compatriots. Eminent Pandits were special targets of Azim's offended arrogance and Birbal Dhar, their leader, the chief victim.

Pandit Birbal Dhar was a high official, one of the several Revenue Collectors, under the Afghan Government. Whether by design or by nature he was slow in collecting the dues of the state and, on that charge, Azim Khan repeatedly reprimanded him but to no effect. Finally, the satrap refused to hear excuses and ordered that the outstanding amount should be made good by the lazy official and paid into the government treasury at once. Knowing Azim Khan and his ways, Birbal realised that whether he paid the arrears or not, in any case he would be severely dealt with because the governor bore grudge against him for his political views. Birbal bad dreaded to rise in rebellion or to flout the behests of the Pathan ; but the peremptory commands drove him to making of a fateful choice. He hurriedly consulted other influential and patriotic noblemen and chalked out a plan to liberate the valley from the clutches of the avaracious and uncultured Afghans. The dye was cast and Birbal accompanied by his son Raj Kak, stealthily repaired to the court of Ranjit Singh, Maharaja of the Punjab, to secure his support for the popular cause. In his flight the adventurous Pandit was assisted by certain Muslim feudal lords, notably Maliks ,Kamdar and Namdar of Kulgam.

Apprised of the conspiracy and Birbal's mission, Azim Khan was wild with indignation and swore vengeance on those who were still within his grasp. Everyone suspected of having a hand in the treasonous plot or who was even remotely connected with the runaway official, was arrested, humiliated and punished. Orders were issued to apprehend and produce before the governor Kudamal, wife of Birbal, together with her daughter-in-law the teen-aged bride of Raj Kak. Sepoys were despatched to Birbal's house to drag the two ladies out of the zenana but they were not to be found there. Patriotic nobles had prudently thought of this at the time of Birbal's departure and a Muslim grandee, Qudus Gojwari, had given the two ladies protection under his roof. Azim was furious at his discomfiture and issued instructions for a thorough search of all possible hiding places. Some people knew the secret but refused to divulge it. For days the governor whimpered and shouted and swore but in vain. At last, however, the extensive hunt proved successful. Considering Gojwari's place to be less secure the trembling ladies were shifted to a safer abode but unfortunately the minions of Azim spotted and seized them.

Of the two victims, Kudamal was more experienced, daring and somewhat politically conscious. She could foresee the impending danger and the life-long servility into which they would be thrown if allowed to live. Such shameful life would be insufferable and she made up her mind to end it. It is said that while carried in a boat towards Sher Garhi, the governor's palace, she gulped a piece of *almas* (precious stone) which adorned her gold ring, to commit suicide. It worked slowly but effectively and before she breathed her last she gratified her heart by declaring bitter truths at the face of Azim Khan.

While convulsing under the effects of the poison generated in her blood by the destructive stone, Kudamal and her daughter-in-law were kicked into the presence of the infuriated Pathan. If Azim Khan had thought of quenching his thirst for revenge by heaping abuses on the head of the helpless women he must have been sorely disappointed. To all his vituperations and invectives Kudamal nonchallantly gave calm, and dignified replies. History has not preserved the precise language in which she expressed herself, but the barest truth boldly told and unperturbedly delivered makes the report an invaluable record in the annals of Kashmir. Threatened to be punished for the treasonous intentions of Birbal and his adherents, intrepid Kudamal, in unmistakable language, approved the conduct of her husband, paid glowing tributes to the patriotism and passion for justice of the Kashmiris who worked for overthrow of the Afghan rule and warned the governor of his fast approaching doom. She bluntly told Azim Khan that, indifferent to her own fate and future, she felt overjoyed in the knowledge that the days of the tyrannical regime were numbered and the deliverance of Kashmir was near.

Rebuked and accosted in fearless tones by a Kashmiri woman who was known for her docility and submissiveness, Azim Khan was crest-fallen. His wounded pride and inflamed rage would have invented the cruellest method of torture to deal with Kudamal but, to his chargin, convulsions shook the noble lady from head to foot ; she fell down senseless and died soon after. The whole brunt of the tyrant's wrath therefore was borne by the bewildered and sorrowful daughter-in-law. She was ordered to be chained and led to Kabul where she lived in slavery for the rest of her accursed life.

The prophesy of Kudamal was fulfilled by thes ubsequent events after her death. Azim Khan proved to be the last Pathan governor and the Afghan rule came to a close in 1819 A.D.

(2) Arnimal

Another woman belonging to the same dark age who is entitled to our admiration for her boldness in facing misfortunes and for the invaluable contribution which she made to Kashmir literature is Arnimal. But her ordeal and heroism were of a different nature. Daughter of a respectable family and wedded to a person of amiable disposition, Arni was pretty, imaginative and accomplished, but all through her life she suffered pangs and torments of separation from her beloved.

Jumma Khan who functioned as the Afghan governor of Kashmir for a period of four years from 1788 to 1792, was no less harsh than other Pathan subedars in treating the Kashmiris and exploiting the country, but the severity of his bleak rule was relieved by a silver lining. He patronised learning and respected scholars and savants. During his days flourished Munshi Bhawani Dass Kachru a Pandit literateur, whose pen-name was "Nikku". He composed Persian poetry in an elegant literary style. His mastery over the foreign language was complete which agreeably surprised the Afghan dignitaries and officials. Frequently Nikku participated in literary debates held by the subedar in honour of visiting Iranian or Afghan poets or other literateurs and the Kashmiri Pandit often won laurels. Munshi Bhawani Dass invented a new mode of writing in Persian called Bahar-i-Tavil. For his merit and erudition, the Pathans respected him and gave him a position of honour at the court.

Arnimal was the wife of the fortunate Munshi Bhawani Dass. As a common practice in the Afghan days and indeed until very recent times, she was married in her childhood, but before she had flowered into a blooming maiden, for some unknown reasons, the poet-husband deserted her. The separation proved painful and tormenting ; her emotions were deeply stirred and, lo, sweet melodious poetry full of grief and pathos flowed from her heart. She sang of love, play, beauty and sorrow; but she was never so moving as when she unburdened herself of the load caused by separation. Lamenting the absence of her beloved she said :

"(Owing to pangs of separation) my complexion
Which was like July jasmine
Has assumed the pallor of the yellow rose
O, when will he come and let me have
A look at his beloved face !

Like any lovelorn, passionate but distracted maiden, Arnimal became the object of taunts and gibes ; people devoid of fine feelings and sensibilities, cracked jokes at her expense. But it did not change her ; she became more absorded in brooding; her days were passed in waiting and yearning. The intensity of feelings made her moans and sobs deeply touching. The way in which she related her grief lent a peculiar charm to her songs :

"When will thy feet touch my courtyard
I will place them on my head, O, come !
For love I left my home and hearth,
And tore the veil, O, come :
I was a famous beauty once and now
I have faded in my teens, O, come !

Again :

"My love, my jasmine, my jasmine
I long for, thee
Come, O, come
I long for thee
I plighted when young, my troth to thee ;
Why didst thou break they plighted troth ?
O, sweet, O, dear
I long for thee."

Forsaken and supportless wives and widows among the Hindus generally return to their parents and eke out the remainder of their miserable lives under father's roof. Arni's parents were kind and sympathetic but all things around her in the ancestral home reminded her of the plight ; the sight of the garden full of blooming flowers agitated her mind and she bemoaned her lot :

"Flowers have bloomed in my father's home
But thou comest not and I feel like one
Accursed, alone and mocked by all."

There are sad remembrances of the unhappy event rendered poignant by the thought of the delightful manner in which the impermenant phase of the conjugal love started. She expresses the intense feelings of the bruised heart in a remarkably tender way in a simple couplet:

"Hardly had I, a budding hourie, bathed me in sandal oil.

When he, love, did flee from me, O, friend."

Genuine love is abiding and perennial ; it can never die or disappear ; it knows neither dismay nor frustration ; it is evergreen and only grows by separation. The sole desire of the lover is that the beloved may be happy wherever he is. The hope that some day both will be reunited sustains Arni through thick and thin. The mere thought of such future reunion gives her joy and contentment ; it gives her courage and braces her to endure mocks of friends and sneers of foes. Defiantly she sings :

"My rivals are flying taunts at me
Since the beloved has ceased to speak to me
Won't he come for a short while, and show me
His face, so that I should offer
My arterial blood as sacrifice for his safety ?
God grant happiness to my beloved.
Let him be kind to others (and forget me) if he will.
Enough for me is the satisfaction (coupled with
A remote hope of restoration to his beloved)
That he, at least, is happy."

The cherished hope of reunion, alas, did not materialise ; the beloved did not return and Arni's prime of life passed in separation. Suddenly, she found herself aged and the years rapidly closing in on her. Her passions had subsided, she had mellowed and softened, but the yearning lingered on in her heart. And now she seemed to hear every animate and inanimate object echoing the throbbings of her heart.

The ups and downs of life was a contant theme for Arni's thinking. In some of her lyrics she has woven patterns out of her own name, Arnimal, which translated literally means "garland of *arni* roses" :

"I was a full bloom summer jasmine
But for him I've turned as pale as *arni* rose
Say friend when will my love come unto me, say when ?"

In advanced years, Arnimal took to spinning wheel to while away the tedium or perhaps as a source of income and mental tranquillity. The sound of the wheel could not but remind her of the tragic story of life. Thus was inspired the most popular of her lyrics which, to this day, is zestfully sung in the homes of the Kashmiris :

"Murmur not my spinning wheel
Thy straw-rings I will oil
From under the sod, O, Hyacinth

Raise thy stately form ;
For, look, the Narcissus is waiting
With cups of wine for thee,
Once faded, will the jasmine bloom again ?"

Began as a vehicle of catharsis, composition of songs became a spontaneous mode of expression with Arnimal. Gradually she acquired mastery over words and invented a unique style of expression. Some of her productions are still extant and belong to classics in Kashmiri. A student will search in vain for religious devotion, idealistic philosophy or mysticism in her songs. She is a class by herself who is of the world yet not of it. The singing of her lyrics creates a spiritual or ethereal atmosphere but it does not resemble the one where individual soul seeks union with the Universal Soul ; no doubt it makes one forget the existence and be melted in love, but, nevertheless, the whole process is human and one stands rooted to the earth.

There is so much similarity in the personal tragedies, the underlying philosophy and their outlook on life between Arnimal and Habba Khatun that when we think of the one the other immediately leaps to mind. The importance of their love lyrics lies in this that they reflect the sorrows, sufferings, passions and yearnings of common women of the valley. The life tragedies of both the poetesses were personal no doubt, but they had a national significance in as much as, like them, all the Kashmiri women had lost everything that makes life worthwhile. Metaphorically speaking, they were forsaken, helpless and stricken ; their hope lay in return of better days. Arni and Habba had undergone terrible physical, mental and spiritual experiences ; the songs came from the bottom of their hearts and they said what they felt. They expressed the unuttered feelings of innumerable women who yearned to be free and live happy, jovial lives. For that reason the lyrics produced a tremendous effect on the minds of those who sang them or heard others singing them. Decades have followed one another but the passage of time has not diminished the value or the effectiveness of these rhymes ; men and women, educated and illiterate, young and old have been equally influenced. We shall continue to be instinctively moved by Habba and Arni until our womanhood fully recuperates and comes into its own ; perhaps even after that.

CHAPTER TEN

FARZI : FROM SLAVE GIRL TO RULER

IN the eighteenth century it had become a well-established practice among the Mughal notables at the Delhi court to have Kashmiri damsels as their wives or concubines. The girls were chosen for fairness of complexion, dignity of manner, gracefulness of form or for some artistic accomplishment. No courtier of distinction considered himself blissful until he had a Kashmiri wife or, if some thing prevented him for entering into wedlock, to have at least one girl from the valley as his mistress. The aspirant noble would either pay a visit to the valley and make a choice out of a number of handsome, budding youths or ask one of his trusted agents to find out a pleasant-looking, healthy and refined girl to meet his wants. In this way many Kashmiri belles of slim figure and gifted with musical voices reached the metropolis of the Mughal empire to adorn the homes of the high-brow keen on begetting fair progeny, or the parlours of rich, lustful seekers of enjoyment. One such blonde was a danseuse about whom we know little beyond that she was kept as a concubine by a distinguished Mughal grandee for the sake of fashion and pleasure. In 1748 A.D. she gave birth to an exceptionally beautiful, plump and lotus-eyed daughter who was destined to play a historical role at the decline of the Mugal empire and carve out a dominion for herself. The name of the new-born was Farzi but in the Mughal idiom she was called Farzana.

We know next to nothing about the precocious child's early life. It may be taken for granted that the Mughal courtier, her luxury-lover father, had no use for her. Probably her mother

too did not stay long with him; for we learn that the forsaken danseuse was ready to sell the pretty daughter to any willing person who could afford to purchase the girl.

This was the time when India was passing through political disturbances and every part of the land was in turmoil. Nadir Shah's invasion had shook the Mughal empire to its foundations and exposed the multitudinous weaknesses of the power that had for nearly three centuries held the country under its sway. Disintegration had set in all around and India was witnessing rise and fall of kingdoms. Foreign adventurers were abounding in the land seeking their fortunes. Stout and healthy young men from different European nationalities, well-versed in the art of fighting, were roaming about raising bands of troops, training them and offering their services to different aspirants for power or more territory. Among these mercenary but useful adventurers was a German, Walter Reinhardt, who had been employed by Jawahar Singh, Raja of Bharatpur. The raja had a design on Delhi and had planned to subdue Shah Alam II.

The Mughal Power had hardly recovered from the shattering blow dealt at it by Nadir when Ahmad Shah Abdali made attempts to capture Delhi. Shah Alam was on the throne. Unmindful of the need of defence, the Emperor lived a colourful life and passed his days enjoying women and wine. Though Abdali was unsuccessful in the achievement of his purpose he enfeebled Shah Alam who had to seek the succour of the rising Mahrattas. Jawhar Singh would not let this opportunity slip out of his hand and he laid a siege of Delhi to bring the dissolute Mughal emperor under his submission. Reinhardt was chief in command of these operations. While fully absorbed in the work in 1765 A.D., he accidently met Farzi and was bewitched at the first sight. The German commander was already married to a Muslim lady but the infatuation produced by the beauty of the new acquaintance was so overpowering that Reindhart could not feel composure of mind until he purchased Farzi for his zenana.

Bodily beauty was not the only possession of Farzi; she had acquired all the accomplishments of a society girl by living among the Mughal ladies and, what was more, she was intelligent and capable enough to share the pursuits of her paramour. Through her devotion and ingenuity she soon captivated the heart of Reinhardt and monopolised his affections.

She would accompany the commander to fields of action and serve there as a soldier. The passionate German forgot other objects of his endearment, including his first wife, and wholly surrendered to Farzi. From an ordinary mistress the slave girl rose to the status of a begum. Walter Reindhart was a man given to moroseness and little talk. Soldiers called him Captain Sombre which gradually assumed the form of Captain Samru. Farzi thus came to be addressed as Begum Samru by which name she is known to history.

Jawahar Singh was foiled in the scheme of subduing Shah Alam II by Mahadji Scindhia, the Mahratta ally of the emperor. Knowing that the Mughals would appreciate his skill better, Samru left the Raja of Bharatpur, transferred allegiance and offered his services to Shah Alam II who readily accepted them. The German commander was granted a jagir extending from Aligarh to Muzaffarnagar. Samru made Sardhana his capital and here the talented Farzi got the opportunity of displaying her ability to administer a territory and skill to organise as well as lead an army on battlefield.

Samru was fed up with an overworked and adventurous life. Fortune having smiled on him it was his great desire to live happily in the lap of his fairy queen. In turning this dream into a reality, Farzi was surprisingly co-operative. She relieved him of the management of the jagir and the control of the troops. Before long she was all in all with Samru in the background enjoying his indolent and happy days. She effected prudent reforms in the territory of the jagir which made it progressive and prosperous, its people contented and loyal. Towards the troops she was no less benevolent. By constantly keeping their welfare in mind she became the beloved commander of the soldiers. In his exultation at her efficiency and indefagability Samru resolved to make her his lawfully wedded spouse ; she was converted to the Roman Catholic faith, baptised and married by him according to the Christian rites. The Christian name given to her was Johanna Nobilis but it was soon forgotten and she continued to be addressed to the last of her days as Begum Samru.

Immoderate living hastened the end of Walter Reinhardt. He died in 1778 A.D. Farzi begot no child. The German commander's senior widow was out of wits and her only son, Zafar, was a spendthrift. Therefore the burden of supervising the jagir and

looking after the troops wholly devolved on Farzi. She became the master of the entire property and a ruler of people. But she was a woman and quite young, hardly thirty summers old. Very few people believed that she could make a successful commander. Nevertheless, the begum fearlessly assumed the onerous charge and zealously applied herself to every detail of work to disprove the ominous prophecies of her detractors.

Hard work coupled with intelligence soon produced good results. Her jagir thrived, its produce increased and the revenue went on mounting up year after year. The troops attained a high standard of efficiency never witnessed during the lifetime of Samru. It was a well-disciplined army composed of infantry and artillery regiments as well as a compliment of cavalry. All told, it was 4,000 strong, but in case of emergency she could and did raise auxiliary forces. She had her own arsenal and foundry where she manufactured arms and ammunition for her use. A visitor to Sardhana wrote in 1810 A D. "She has a regular cantonment for her troops, and a strong fort containing some good houses for officers and their families.... a park of artillery is in excellent order."[1] There were no less than eighty-two European officers in the army notable among whom, in the beginning, were Merchand, Baurs, Evans and Dudrence mostly engaged in withstanding the incursions of the Sikhs. Later on she employed George Thomas, an Irishman, and Le Vasseau, Saleur and Colonel Poethod, all Frenchmen. At the time of her death in 1836 A.D., General Regholini led her troops and he was assisted by eleven other European officers including John Thomas.

Part of Farzi's troops used to be stationed at the imperial headquarters but the bulk remained at Sardhana under her direct supervision. Within three years after the death of her husband, Farzi managed the jagir and organised the troops so efficiently that in 1780 A.D. she was looked upon as a big power by the neighbouring states. She was not a sovereign monarch but only a feudatory chief, yet it speaks of her capability that the Mughal Emperor, her over-lord, thought highly of her.

Having allayed the fears of admirers and silenced the tongues of calumniators by consolidating her position, Farzi thought of plunging into wider politics of the Mughal empire. Soon an

1. Quoted in the *Statesman*, New Delhi dt. 9th March, 1957.

opportunity presented itself. In or about 1787 A.D. Ghulam Qadir, Rohilla Chief of Saharanpur, planned to advance on Delhi and force Shah Alam to appoint him as Prime Minister in place of Mahadji Scindhia. Such was the pitiable plight of the impotent Mughal that, unopposed, the Rohilla brigand entered the royal palace and demanded, under pressure of arms, the fulfilment of his desire. A gross insult of truculent nature to her suzerain lord was more than Begum Samru could endure. She hurried to Delhi and, on arrival at the capital, immediately alerted her troops. Ghulam Qadir was not unaware of the power and resources of the begum. Considering wit as better part of valour he played his tricks and called her his sister. The tactful begum met him equally in that art of chicanery and allowed him to play the game. To hoodwink him she promised the Rohilla chief that her troops would join him next morning. Deluded, Ghulam Qadir retired to his camp and the begum forthwith took control of the palace and pledged her life for the protection and safety of the emperor. She set up a battery to face the foe if he dare oppose her. The rebel Rohilla found next morning that he had been outwitted. He threatened to attack the palace and demanded the person of Shah Alam. But now the begum was fully prepared to give him battle and when her battery spoke in no uncertain terms the Rohilla consulted his safety in precipitate withdrawal. Together with his dismayed troops he melted away and from a far off distance entreated the begum to make his peace with the emperor.

This was an unforgettable event in the life of Farzi. She had been loyal to her liege-lord and had defended his honour and prestige. The grateful Shah Alam recognised the timely services of Begum Samru by conferring on her the exalted title of Zeb-un-nisa (Ornament of Women). Her sincerity and uprightness were universally acknowledged. Had she desired to become the empress of India she could have joined hands with the rebel Rohilla, deposed Shah Alam and ended the Mughal rule in India. But such a course, however tempting, would have been dishonourable in her eyes ; the very thought of overthrowing her benefactor was revolting to her ; she could never be false to her salt.

Some time later, another disgruntled chief, Najaf Quli Khan, raised banner of revolt against the Mughal power. Shaking off his laziness on the occasion Shah Alam took the field in

person to defeat the insurgents, but only after Begum Samru had arrived along with a strong contingent of her troops to support him in the rear. It so happened that the Khan's forces made a sally and scattered the imperial armies by breaking their lines at one place ; a large number of the royal soldiers were put to sword and many more were forced to surrender arms ; the emperor's life was in imminent danger. But the valiant Kashmiri heroine did not lose presence of mind. Quietly, but bravely, the begum escorted Shah Alam out of the battle-field, placed him safely in her private quarters, hurried back to the front and then, with fresh vigour, conducted the operations against the rebels. Rising equal to the occasion, she came out of her palanquin and ordered the battery to fire. Seeing her in the best of spirits and indomitably leading them, the imperial armies as well as her own troops rallied quickly and advanced with deafening war cries. The fresh onslaught terrified the Khan's men and they fled in all directions ; another day of defeat was turned into victory for the Mughals. Shah Alam continued to be the emperer.

Heavily weighed under the burden of Begum Samru's timely succours, grateful Shah Alam desired to acknowledge his debt. He called an open durbar which was attended by all the faithful nobles, courtiers and grandees whom the emperor could still command and collect in the palace. In that august gathering he gave the brave lady many presents and conferred upon her a second title of "Most Beloved Daughter" in recognition of her invaluable services.

Now Begum Samru became a powerful personality at the Mughal court. She was celebrated throughout the empire and beyond, not only as an able administrator, a wide-awake ruler and a shrewd politician but also as a capable military commander who could organise and lead troops to victory cleverly removing all obstacles and impediments on her path. The enemies of the Mughal power and all unscrupulous adventurers spread the myth that she was a witch and could work wonders through magic on the battle-field. So long as she resided in Delhi nobody could harm the emperor or think of doing what he liked to undermine the foundations of the Mughal rule. Unfortunately Prince Mirza, son of Shah Alam, was possessed by a desire to manage the vast dominions and implored the begum to grant his request. Though fully conscious of the youth's

moral and intellectual aberrations she deemed it advisable to agree. She decided no more to interfere in the affairs of the royal family and leave the emperor and his dependents to their fate. She returned to Sardhana and gave the prince free hand to conduct his ancestral dominions. Within a short duration the sleeping insurgents raised their heads again ; there was turmoil in several parts and the government became unstable causing perturbation to the well-wishers of the Mughal crown.

The calm restored by the wisdom and labour of the begum had created an illusion in the mind of Prince Mirza that, if allowed freedom, he could enjoy power and luxuries. He had thought the Mughal empire a bed of roses which it had ceased to be for several decades. Steeped in idolence and merry-making, he soon forgot all about the foes who were lying low and biding their time. They promptly seized the opportunity which presented itself by the withdrawal of Begum Samru to Sardhana and the follies committed by Mirza. Ghulam Qadir Rohilla who was smarting under the pain of his previous discomfiture, suddenly invaded Delhi, entered the palace, captured Shah Alam and tore out his eyes with a knife. The Begum was upset to hear the shocking report but she could find no reason to alter her resolve.

Begum Samru bended her energy solely in effecting improvements to the jagir. Year after year she made additions to her wealth, prestige and reputation. The British Government could not but admire her achievements. She was addressed as her highness. Sardhana was in a flourishing state and other towns were making steady progress. The annual revenue of the jagir amounted to eight lakhs of rupees. The begum enjoyed the right to collect transit duties on all goods passing through her territories either by land or by water. She was equally capable at finance and husbanded her income sagaciously. The expenditure on the military establishment was nearly 50% of the revenue, but only rupees eighty thousand were spent on the civil administration.

Vulgarities of politics and occupation with warfare and court intrigues did not blunt the finer sensibilities of Begum Samru. Romance was ever alive in her heart and occasionally inflamed her passions. In 1790 A.D. one mild-mannered and good tempered Frenchman, Levassoult, entered her services. He was an

attractive, well-built and finely behaved young man. She at once fell in love and wanted to possess him as her own. But open marriage was very difficult since he was a new comer ; her European officers would have felt offended and surely disapproved of it. However, she could not help being intimately attached to the charming youth and is reported to have secretly performed nuptials. Unhappily, after the marriage, Levassoult became arrogant and indiscreet. He utterly lacked the prudence of the begum. Vainly he humiliated brother officers in the army. His too much familiarity with her was resented by rank and file. The European commanders and captains had never before been treated as hirelings and were not excluded from the table by her. Levassoult changed the atmosphere of friendliness and emphasised the distinction between the mistress and her employees. Gone were the days when the officers considered themselves as members of the family of which the begum was the head ; gone was the affection which the troops cherished for their benevolent mistress. Her principal adviser Lt. Thomas who had seen her rise to fame and power left her in disgust and preferred the service of Scindhia.

Under the new master Thomas could not feel happy until he was able to teach the begum a lesson and to punish Levassoult. It was easy to secure the consent of Scindhia who had his own accounts to square with her. Then, in order to wreak vengeance, Thomas set out with sufficient troops to invade Sardhana. The begum's men had lost their old devotion and fire ; her officers were indifferent to the outcome ; the battle was ending in her defeat and she was forced to retreat to some place of safety. Realising the danger she, accompanied by Levassoult, fled but was hotly pursued by the enemy. The lovers held hurried consultation. Both swore to live and die together. They could not endure the frightening idea of an agonising death at the hands of the enemy. The flight was resumed, the begum in palanquin and Levassoult on horseback. Suddenly a cry was heard from inside the covered palanquin and on inspection levassoult found that the begum was wounded by her own dagger and the blood was flowing. Evidently, with no hope of escape, she had committed suicide. True to his pledge Levassoult put a pistol to his head and ended his life. Imagine the surprise of the entourage when the enemies took the begum prisoner and found that she had mere scratches in her ribs.

Did the Begum seriously commit suicide or only feigned to take her life in order to get rid of Levassoult and thus regain the confidence of her men and save herself from disaster. Opinions are divided on this point, but the general concensus is that the stupid ways and supercilious behaviour of her lover had sickened her. She preferred the active life of a ruler and commander to indulgence in romance with a vainglorious person however handsome. She was not ignorant of the source of her troubles and therefore it would not be surprising if she played a trick and ended Levassoult's life with his own hands.

The begum recovered consciousness soon after she was captured by the enemy but under instigation of unrelenting Thomas she was treated harshly. Her own officers, too, would not easily forgive her ; only Frenchman Saleur, witness to the secret marriage, remained loyal. Bound to a gun-carriage she was exposed to the blazing heat of the sun and denied food and drink for a week. In such miserable condition she despatched humble and piteous letters to Thomas imploring him to rescue her. For some time he was adamant but gradually his heart melted and he remembered the happy days he had passed under her. Levassoult's death had already cooled the fire of Thomas' rage and the letters made him forget the grudge he bore to the begum. He came and personally rescued her from the hands of the tormenters. She was immediately restored to her former position. Zafar who had been, in the meantime, made the master of Sardhana was ordered to vacate.

The affair with Levassoult taught the begum a good lesson which she could never forget. She had paid heavily for a stride in the world of romance ; she had impaired her fame and damaged her interests; she must without loss of time regain old power and reputation. She tried to forget all about Levassoult and the brief period of lovemaking as a wild dream, an incubus, and resumed the name of Begum Samru. She reorganised the troops, appointing Saleur as her chief adviser, made amends for her mistakes, mollified her officers and effected fresh improvements in the administration of the jagir.

The beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed the phenomenal advance of the British as the most potential force in the subcontinent of India. When the native princes lost battle after battle to the rising power and even the mighty Scindhia was defeated on the field of Assaye, Begum Samru considered it

advisable to establish friendly relations with the British. Many amusing stories are told of the methods through which she wooed them. She interviewed eminent functionaries including the British Resident at Delhi, and made protestations of her affection for the white man. She paid a visit to General Lake who was in command of the British forces in North India. The famous soldier is reported to have been bewitched by her exceptionally handsome face and uncommon elegance in attire. Being tipsy at the moment, he unintentionally kissed her on the cheek as a mark of deep admiration. Unperplexed, though blushed, the begum accepted the unoriental custom as a tribute to her physical and mental attainments rather than as something exceptionable. To her retinue she explained that the Padre (Rev. Father) had kissed her as his daughter. The situation was admirably saved. On return of sobriety, the general repented his rash act but ever after he became her sincere friend, the champion of her cause in the British circles. Her purpose was achieved.

But the policy of annexation, vigorously pursued by Lord Wellesly, started a chain of fresh troubles for Begum Samru. The British Governor-General could not feel satisfied unless a large slice of her jagir was taken away and her troops disbanded. To be shorn of the army was humiliating and she felt lowered in the eyes of her people and other ruling chiefs. But she knew to fight against the British would be suicidal. She, therefore, resorted to diplomatic manoeuvres and employed all her ingenuity, skill and experience to bring home to the British that they could not ingnore her importance and help in the prosecution of their expansionist policy. She opened negotiations with Holkar and the Sikhs, allowed them all facilities to make incursions into the British territories. She would not, however, allow the two allies to commit excesses or do anything ignominious. Once through her intercession a British officer was rescued from the clutches of the Sikhs; he was about to be butchered mercilessly. Her sole object in succouring the enemies of the British was to vindicate her own honour and prestige. With that purpose in view, she continued to make appeals for the friendship of the British. Frequently she would tickle their sense of vanity. The crooked diplomacy did not fail to produce results and her endeavours were finally crowned with success when, in 1805 A.D., with the replacement of Wellesly by Carnwallis, she was re-installed as

the chief of the Sardhana jagir with full administrative powers.

The remaining thirty-one years of Begum Samru's life were calm and devoted to improvement of the jagir and welfare of its people. She died in 1836 at the green old age of 88 and was mourned by a vast number of her admirers and friends among whom were people belonging to different faiths and diverse nationalities. In Rome high mass was celebrated "with mournful splendour" in the Church of San Carlo addressing which the Principal of the English College said : "The Princess whom we commemorate, was powerful in her day; she ruled her dominions with more than a woman's arm; she guided with skill the arduous counsels of peace; by many she was beloved, by others feared. Yet is she now for ever departed."[2]

Begum Samru was dwarfish and plump ; her colour was fair, nose almost acquiline, eyes large, black and animated. The glamour of her beauty was enthralling. Even at the age of sixty her complexion remained fresh and uncommonly handsome. She wore the aristocratic Mughal costume made of the most costly materials with a richly embroidered and well-adorned Kashmir shawl. She smoked and when at home pulled at a multilooped hookah. A large portrait of the begum may be seen on the wall of the Audience Hall in the Raj Bhavan (Government House) at Lucknow even today which is true to her life and character. She looks with majestic, piercing eyes at the onlookers while the loop of the hookah is in her hand.

Begum Samru spoke Kashmiri, Persian and Hindustani fluently and with grace. She was a consummate master of the art of personal negotiations. One English lady who knew her well observed that the begum could even be fascinating when she had a point to carry.

Despite the riches she amassed, her personal expenses were well within limits and she was acclaimed as the most frugal and thrifty of the contemporary ruling chiefs. At the time of her death her treasury contained no less than fifty lakhs of rupees. This was praiseworthy in view of the fact that most of the jagirdars squandered wealth, impoverished their estates and left huge debts behind them.

Begum Samru possessed inexhaustible energy. In administering the jagir, in controlling the troops, in conducting negotiations and in executing her plans, she attended personally to

2. The *Statesman*, New Delhi, March 9, 1957.

the details of work. She was efficient, intelligent and shrewd. Her wits did not forsake her even at an advanced age. A French traveller who met her in 1834 A.D., only two years before her death, describes her as a sort of walking mummy who still looks after all her affairs, listens to two or three secretaries at once, and at the same time dictates to as many others.

That Begum Samru employed chicanery, deceit and pretence to achieve her aim is unhappily true, but, without justifying the blemishes in her character, we may point out that these traits were part and parcel of the contemporary political morality ; that might extenuate the guilt but can not exonerate her. There can, however, be no doubt that she was bold and her spirit indomitable. She had seen many an action and commanded troops in person on the battlefield. After bonds of friendly alliance with the British were cemented, which made her secure in a world of turmoil, no occasion arose for her to wield arms. But she was always prepared to brave risks and face bullets. In 1826 A.D., the British had to lay siege at Bharatpur. Lord Combermere who was in charge of the operations, disapproved of any native prince participating in the campaign. Begum Samru expressed indignation at the insult because she was not asked to assist the British forces. Speaking about it, Major Archer, aide-de-camp to Lord Combermere, records in his *memoirs* : "When the army was before Bharatpur in 1826 A.D. the Commander-in-Chief was desirous that no native chief of our allies should accompany the besieging force with any of his troops; this order hurt the pride of the Begum who remonstrated. She was told that the large and holy place of Muttra was to be confided to her care. 'Nonsense', said she, 'If I don't go to Bharatpur, all Hindustan will say I am grown a coward in my old age".[3] She was 76 years old at the time.

Begum Samru was a devoted Christian of Roman Catholic persuasion. She spent large sums of money on dispelling ignorance, spreading education and constructing edifices for public use. In 1809 A.D. she laid the foundations of a Church at Sardhana on the model of St. Peters in Rome. Both the Indian and European artistic talents were employed in planning and building the church. Carved pieces of marble were imported from Italy for use in the construction. It took thirteen years to complete the edifice. A gifted Italian artist painted the

3. Quoted by Skinner in his *Journal* Vol. I, P. 147 n.

ceremony of consecration when the church was thrown open to public in 1822 A.D. The original painting is in the Vatican but a copy of it is in the Raj Bhavan at Lucknow. In the churchyard is the tomb of the begum over which her figure sits impassively carved in marble. Her adopted son, David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre, has fittingly paid the following tribute to her memory inscribed on the monument : "To her powerful mind, her remarkable talent, and the wisdom, justice and moderation, with which she governed for a period exceeding half a century, he to whom she was more than a mother, is not the person to award the praise but in grateful respect to her beloved memory is this monument erected."[4] The liberal begum's munificence knew no limitations of creed or race. Her endowments were not confined to Christians ; she subscribed open-handedly to Hindu and Muslim institutions. She donated more than six lakhs of rupees to various charitable and pious purposes and gave instructions for founding a college for the benefit of young men—a desire which she could not fulfil during lifetime.

Not all the important events of Begum Samru's fourscore and eight years are known to us. Captain Munday in his *Journal of a Tour in India* admits that the history of her life, if properly known, would form a series of scenes such as, perhaps, no other woman could have sustained. Colonel Skinner had seen her in her youth "leading on her troops to the attack in persor, and displaying, in the midst of carnage, the greatest interpidity and presence of mind."[5] K.M. Munshi, a former Congress Governor of Uttar Pradesh, believes that she was "the most formidable woman of the decadent India." Describing her achievements and character, he says : "She looked after her life well and wisely. Her administration was mild and upright. The lands were well looked after and yielded good harvest ; her people were as prosperous as any in India at the time. Her generosity became proverbial and she carried through a programme of building palaces, churches, bridges and other works of public utility unfamiliar in that age."[6]

This wonderful story of a resourceful slave-girl born of a danseuse bears witness to the fact that centuries of suppression by alien despots had failed to destroy the inborn qualities of

4. Quoted in *Statesman*, New Delhi, March 9, 1957.
5. Quoted in *Kashir* Vol, II, Pp. 391-392.
6. In Kulpati's letter to Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

Kashmiri women. In the nineteenth century they continued to possess the potentialities of greatness as did their ancesstresses in the bygone ages. Mughals, Pathans, and Sikhs, despite their highhandedness and cruelties, had not been able to impoverish the minds of Kashmiri women. The seeds of many virtues were there; only they needed opportunity to germinate and grow. One fortunate Farzi got it outside her homeland and rose to great heights inconceivable in case of those living in the valley whom, first politics and later on custom, had imprisoned in the seclusion of homes.

Traducers of the Kashmiris and some ill-formed writers have disbelieved that a heroine of the stature of Begum Samru could belong to Kashmiri race. She was called an Arab, an Iranian or anything else but a Kashmiri. A controversy continued for many years and opinions differed on the subject. Now research scholars are agreed that there can be little doubt about Begum Samru being a Kashmiri by descent. The issue was clinched in 1925 by the discovery of a letter in original in the records preserved at Pondichery which clearly states that the begum hailed from the beautiful vale. The letter was written by Frenchman Commander Bussy to Marshall de Castries, Royal Minister of France, and was brought incidentally to light by M.A. Singervelu, curator of the old records in the French possession of Pondichery.[7]

Begum Samru was buried in the splendid cathedral at Sardhana and, after death, was raised by the Catholic church, in recognition of her piety and good work, to the holy status of saints.

7. *Kashir*, Vol. II, P. 392.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TOTAL ECLIPSE

FROM the beginning of the eighteenth century, for a period of roughly one hundred and sixty years, the people of Kashmir have suffered untold miseries at the hands of alien rulers. It may be called the darkest chapter in the annals of the valley. The governors under the declining Mughal rule were, generally, irresponsible, cruel and greedy; the Afghans who succeeded them were merciless extortionists and mean sensualists. The Sikhs who captured the valley in 1819 A.D. were no better in their dealings; their rapacity was unbounded, their bigotry uncontrolled. The sole aim of the Sikhs would appear to have been to plunder the country and, for that purpose, to keep the Kashmiris in a state of suppression and terror.[1] In such circumstances, the condition of women could hardly improve and indeed the social

1. **Mihan Singh is reputed to have been the mildest and the best of the Sikh Governors. But how he treated women may be imagined from the following incident recorded by Vigne :**

"Whilst I was at Kabul, Mihan Singh was guilty of an act of atrocity which may be considered as a specimen of the summary and vindictive justice administered to the unfortunate inmates of an eastern harem. He baked alive his favourite wife, the mother of his only son. She happened to be in the Punjab, where some of her enemies accused her of an intrigue, and Ranjit sent her to her husband in Kashmir. Her son, who feared the worst from the hands of his father, dashed his turban on the ground before him (the most imploring act of supplication that an oriental can make use of) and knelt bare-headed at his feat. Mihan Singh promised to forgive her. Soon afterwards the poor lad was sent to Punjab, in order to be there when Sir Henry Fane, the commander-in-chief, was on his visit to Lahore. His unfortunate mother was then seized and forced into a bath, the temperature of which was then increased for the purpose of destroying her by suffocation. This did not succeed as soon as was expected; her screams were so horrible that several people left the Shyr Gurh, that they might not be obliged to listen to them ; and in the end, her husband sent her a bowl of poison, which she swallowed." (Op. cit., vol. II, Pp. 72-73).

degeneration that had set in earlier was hastened by the atrocious behaviour of the Sikhs. New and more chains were forged to enslave the harried women of the valley.

The Sikh rule did not last long. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839 A.D., the Sikhs were disorganised and the nobles plotted against each other. Intrigues and conspiracies were hatched by diverse factions at the Lahore court to annihilate each other. Worse still, the Sikh Government came into clash with the rising and mighty imperialist power of the British which had become formidable by bringing the whole of the subcontinent beyond Satluj under its sway.

By 1846 A.D., the British vanquished the Sikhs on battle-field and, as a reward for the services which Gulab Singh, Dogra raja of Jammu, had rendered to them in his capacity as the Prime Minister of the Sikh Government, he was made the ruler of Kashmir under the provisions of the infamous Treaty of Amritsar. The Dogra chief did not become the sovereign master of the country; his position was to be that of a feudatory lord and the paramountcy, with its prerogatives and powers of supervision, were reserved by the suzerain British for themselves. Fortunately the new set-up functioned to the benefit of the Kashmiris because it was through intercession of the British from time to time that modernism was introduced in the valley not without stiff opposition from the Dogra rulers.

The Dogras of Jammu are a handsome race of amiable people. Bold, straightforward, tolerant and simple-minded, they make the best of friends. Being neighbours, the Kashmiris and Dogras have several political and cultural affinities though they differ too in many respects. In history, at times, the Kashmiris have ruled over the Dogras and so have the Dogras subjugated the Kashmiris; but mostly they have lived as friends and allies and when they have done so the alliance has contributed to mutual good. Maharaja Gulab Singh and his descendants were, in several respects, better than their predecessors, both the Afghans and the Sikhs. Had the Dogras of the nineteenth century been enlightened and a little less greedy, the Kashmiris might have seen a wholesome change in their social life. But the new rulers were social obscurantists and political reactionaries; particularly their ideas about women were no better than those of barbarian tribes. By the commands of the Mughal Emperors and the legislation enacted by the British

Governor-General, William Bentin, the inhuman custom of sati had been abolished in most parts of India but the Dogra Rajputs continued to observe the revolting practice as the Indian law was not applicable to the native states. G.T. Vigne who visited Northern India in 1835 A.D. has described a horrifying scene of the burning of women which he had the misfortune to witness :

"One morning my munshi came to me, and told me that a sati (suttee), or widow, who was going to burn herself on the funeral pile of her husband, was about to pass by the garden gate. I hastened to obtain a sight of her. She was dressed in her gayest attire ; a large crowd of persons followed her, as she walked forward with a hurried and faltering step, like that of a person about to faint. A brahman supported her on either side, and these, as well as many around were calling loudly and almost fiercely upon the different Hindu deities ; and the name which was most repeatedly and most earnestly called upon was that of Jaganath.....Her countenance had assumed a sickly and ghastly appearance, which was partly owing to internal agitation, and partly, so I was informed, to the effect of opium and *bang* and other narcotics, with which she had been previously drugged, in order to render her less awake to the misery of her situation. She was not, however, so insensible to what was passing as to be inattentive to two persons in particular, amongst several others who were stopping before her and were evidently imploring her blessings—they were probably near relations. She was presented at intervals with a plate of moist red colour, in which saffron was no doubt an ingredient, and into this she dipped the ends of her fingers, and then impressed them on the shoulders of the persons who stopped before her in order to be thus marked.

"In about half an hour the preparations were completed. She was regularly thatched in, upon the top of the pile, whilst her husband's body yet lay outside. It was finally lifted upon her ; the head, as usual, and which is the most interesting part of the ceremony, was received upon her jap ; the fire applied in different parts ; and all was so quickly enveloped in a shround of mingled flame and smoke, that I believe her sufferings to have been of very short duration, as she must almost immediately have been suffocated."[2]

The sect of Rajputs to which the ruling class belonged used to bury alive the girls at their birth and took pride in doing so, because with the disappearance of girls they were, they thought, spared the humiliation of becoming fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law ! This savage custom lingered on till the twenties of the present century when the Maharaja contrived to stop it by granting special privileges to his clansmen who had the "misfortune" to beget daughers. Through a royal command the revenue authorities were empowered to allot a plot of government land or sanction a cash grant to every Rajput who had an unmarried girl and promised to rear her.

The abominable practice of destroying ones own progeny illustrates, as nothing else does, the general attitude of the

2. Op. cit., Vol. I, Pp. 82-83.

Dogra rulers towards womenfolk. Those who could not suffer their own daughters to live would be the last persons to see the women of their subjects enjoying any liberties, however small. Any improvement in deteriorated social condition was out of question ; there was further aggravation in the wretchedness of women ; hardships were augmented ; the cup of their miseries was full.

At the advent of Maharaja Ranbir Singh's rule in 1858 A.D., Kashmiri women had lost everything for which they were illustrious in the past ages. Continued suppression for centuries and tyranny of wicked rulers had deprived them of their physical beauty and intellectual refinements; they were reduced virtually to a subhuman state and lived merely through sufferance.

In the long and unrelieved period of slavery, the Kashmiris forgot all about the past and the heights that women had scaled in some periods of their history. A time had come when, through force of habit, the people began to believe that the degraded status which hard days had forced upon the women was natural to them ; a religious sanctity was attached to the disabilities and disqualifications which foreign rule had imposed on them. It was taken as axiomatic that the women were fit only to be domestic slaves, objects of carnal enjoyment or, at best, means for procreation of children. An ideal woman was depicted as one whose ambition never soared beyond devoted ministrations to the wants of her lord, the husband, and maintenance of the home for his children's comfort. In grandiloquent language selfish men-philosophers portrayed her as the queen of the home where man had hardly any say and had to submit meekly to her dictates. But such clumsy attempts at rationalisation failed to conceal the hideous truth that woman had become a druge and all her gifts and talents were rusting unused within her, partly due to the political and social conditions created by foreign rule but partly also as a result of the ignorance and heartlessness of the self-centered and conceited men.

The debasement of social philosophy and religious doctrines which not only permitted but also eulogised the degeneration and enslavement of women was the most effective means of eclipsing them. Ignorance becomes pernicious when it is dignified as virtue. To be a pretty woman was praiseworthy in the good old days ; to be fashionable and presentable in appearance

was appreciated. It was an enviable good luck to possess well-proportioned limbs and a graceful body. Several coiffures are known to have been in vogue, and archaeology has corroborated history in showing that Kashmir women adorned their lovely bodies with lovlier costumes and ornaments. Their fastidiousness in matter of personal adornment has been favourably commented upon by many indigenous writers before loss of freedom.

But during the times of which we are speaking now, all innocent enjoyment was taboo. Gone were the days when women used cosmetics and beauty aids to enhance the natural attractiveness of their bodies. In rare cases would a lady enjoy the luxury of a soap-wash and that without the knowledge of elders. Fragrant powders or scented oils formed no part of their toilette ; such indulgences were looked down upon and forbidden.

Could women in such strangling, cramping environments cultivate the noble arts of singing and dancing ? Could they publicly express their deep feelings and emotions, urges and aspirations in different spheres of social life ? It was obviously impossible, at any rate in case of women belonging to classes as were supposed to have a sense of "respectibility" in them. In the days of advancement and prosperity, a people admire those who acquire knowledge of the fine arts and sciences ; but proficiency in cultural pursuits during periods of degradation and debasement, is contemptuously derided. It is not therefore surprising that only low caste women who did not cherish any false sense of respectibility and had no conceit to misguide them, became the custodians of the ancient cultural heritage. Writing in 1875 A.D., Frederic Drew who functioned as a high official under the Dogras for nearly a decade, says : "The Batal is one of those tribes whose members are outcasts from the community. Like the Dums (old Domba) of the Outer Hills, the Batals have to do the dirtiest work ; it is part of their trade to remove and skin carcases and to cure leather...By the analogy of other parts, these Batals are very likely to be the remnants of inhabitants earlier than the Aryans. From among them are provided the musicians and the dancers ; the dancing girls whom one sees at the darbars and festivals which the Maharaja holds at Srinagar are of that race."[3] It would have scandalised the Kashmiri

3. Frederic Drew, *The Northern Barrier of India*, (Edward Stanford, London, 1877), P.132.

society in the nineteenth century to find a lady gratifying her desire of appearing lovely or graceful. To entertain any such unbecoming wish was inexcusable ; only prostitutes and harlots would be bold enough to dress themselves in shining clothes or have an elegant style of hair. A gentle woman desirous of wearing fashionable dresses was unhesitatingly declared to be on way to whoredom.

Even cleanliness among women unless it be for religious purposes, was, by and large, discouraged and never rewarded or highly spoken of. Sluttish appearance had been fostered first in the days of Afghans ; then it had a justification ; to protect young and innocent girls from being assaulted or ravished they had to look ugly and untidy. Subsequently, under the Sikhs, it acquired sanctity of a national habit. The fact that under oppressive regimes cleanliness involved imposition or abduction and thus the habit of uncleanliness was forced on women is stated by a modern historian by quoting the unsophisticated reply of a patient in distress. "Once when a Zenana missionary was impelled to ask, 'O, dear Kashmiri women, why won't you wash', they looked at her wondering and replied. 'We have been so oppressed that we cannot care to be clean'."[4] But the statement is only a half-truth. In the beginning of the twentieth century when the reply was given in a Zenana hospital at Srinagar, it was not so much the oppression of foreign rule that prevented women to be clean; it was the perverted social and moral philosophy evolved by selfish men which encouraged them to be untidy and carelessly dressed.

Foreign domination and long certuries of slavery had gradually wrought unwholesome changes in the national dress of the Kashmiris. Men no more put on clothing as befitted self-respecting, proud and free people nor did women wear garments which made them graceful or marked the prominent features of their beautiful bodily form. An cumbersome, loose, unwieldy gown called *pheran* had taken the place of the ancient national costume; it was worn by both men and women of all classes and communities and made them look more like bags than human beings. Heavy and full, tunic-fashion, it buttoned at the neck and fell to the feet in one fold. In summer it was made of cotton, in winter of wool. It was a mark of respectibility to turn the sleeves back in folds. The *pherans* of well-to-do people

4. *Kashir*, Vol. I, P. 23.

had detachable lining (*pooch*) of coarse cloth. The usual dress of common women was an ample *pheran* of dark-blue cotton print with a red pattern stamped on it, or it may be of gray-striped cotton. Little girls wore small skull caps. After marriage, however, a Muslim lady would have, as her head-dress a thicker turban-like red cap (*qasaba*) studded with innumerable pins and over it a square of country cloth (*pooch*) to act, in case of necessity, as veil which also usually covered the whole back. Muslim women of good position and respectable families would not stir out of the house without trousers. Panditanis wore dresses of dark maroon and blue and fastened a girdle (*loongi*) of white or crimson colour round their waists. Besides white round turban (*taranga*) skilfully set, they had a white head-gear (*pooch*) but no embroidery except on sleeves and around the collars of the *pheran*; they never put on leather shoes but stuck to old fashioned grass sandals known as *pullahur* and made from a wisp of rice-grass. Panditanis neither wore any shirt nor drawers nor trousers. On the whole, the unseemly mode of clothing was neither graceful nor comfortable.

Some writers have stated that the Mughals introduced this apparel for people in the valley to demoralise and control the turbulent and warlike Kashmiris after they had repeatedly risen in revolt during the early part of the alien rule. Some others are of the opinion that the loose gown came into fashion when the Kashmiris were involved in internecine civil strife, had ceased to be ambitious and were leading an indolent stay-at-home-life, long before the Muslims captured political power. Whatever be the truth, the fact remains that *pheran* continued to be a source of many weaknesses and vices. Sir Walter R. Lawrence, a sympathetic critic of the Kashmiris who lived among them for years, wrote in 1890 : "If the character of a people is reflected in its clothes, then the Kashmiris are mean and effeminate."[5] He adds that the dress detracts from personal appearance of the Kashmiris.

Seclusion, squalor, hard manual labour, early marriage, malnutrition and low status in society gave birth to manifold diseases among women. They lost the bloom, the elegance and the vigour that had once made them conspicuous among the women of the East and for which world travellers had celebrated

5. Walter, R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, (Henry Frowde, London, 1895), P. 252.

them. They looked emaciated, haggard, sickly and frail. A superficial observer was not unreasonably deceived and inclined to pass adverse comments on their complexion. Victor Jacquemont, a French naturalist who visited Kashmir during the days of the Sikhs, wrote: "Know that I have never seen anywhere such hideous witches as in Cashmere. The female race is remarkably ugly."[6] Jacquemont was no doubt mistaken. He could not distinguish between the basic prettiness of the Kashmiri female form and the ugly crust that adverse circumstances had laid over it. Those who looked closer into the faces and the bodies, could not help observing that the physical beauty was there; only vagaries of time and cruelty of man had tarnished it. George Forster who visited the valley in 1783 A.D., compared the Kashmiri women with the French who are noted for their charm, adding that the Kashmiris would be called brunettes in South of France or Spain."[7] G.T. Vigne did not think that the beauty of the women had been overrated. He praised them for large-almond shaped, hazel eyes and a white regular set of teeth. He says: "Many of the women are handsome enough to induce a man to exclaim as did the Assyrian soldiers, when they beheld the beauty of Judith,—who would despise this people that have among them such women." Vigne confesses that Kashmiri women are usually gifted with a style of figure which would entitle them to the appellation of fine or handsome women in European Society."[8]

Nevertheless, what Jacquemont said in 1830 A.D., when he travelled through North India, carried an element of truth in it. The valley had been denuded of its precious wealth, the cream of womanhood, by the Mughals and the Afghans. Those whom good luck or some favourable circumstances saved from falling into the clutches of the grasping foreigner, were subject to strict observance of purdah and harsh treatment from almost the moment of birth. Hard labour, colossal ignorance and lack of fresh air together with indifference on the part of men combined to undermine health, ruin physique and shatter the spirit of Kashmiri women. It was not surprising, therefore,

6. Victor Jacquemont, *Letters From India*, (Edward Churton, London, 1834), P. 65.
7. George Forster, *Journey From Bengal to England*, (R. Fauldor & Son, London, 1808)
8. Op. cit. Vol. II, P. 143.

that beautiful faces or attractive features were rarely to be witnessed in them for generations. Sir Walter Lawrence whom nobody can accuse of animosity towards or even of unfair criticism of the Kashmiris, says : "I have seen thousands of women in the villages and can not remember, save one or two exceptions, ever seeing a really beautiful face. They seem to age very quickly, and though the children are often lovely the average peasant woman is plain."[9] The bodily form of Kashmiri woman had been vastly affected; she was no more her old self but a weakling. Thousands of young females died prematurely and many more eked out diseased existence. The death rate was appalling and the ratio of the population of women to that of men was gradually decreasing. Among all classes there was lesser number of females than that of males.

Polygamy which in ancient times was restricted to royal families, or was, at the most, prevalent among the nobles and well-to-do classes had now spread, to a certain extent, to the middle classes. Though Muslims were greater victim of the evil, there were cases among the Hindus also where men had violated the equitable law of monogamy. As a compensation, no doubt, Muslim women enjoyed the rights of divorce and remarriage after the death of husband, but the Hindu women continued to be deprived of both. Divorce and remarriage of widows were detested by selfish Hindus who attached moral and religious stigma to these essential liberties and thus the unfortunate women remained subservient to the male authority for the whole of their lives. The magnitude of cruelty in enforced widowhood can be estimated by the fact that, in 1920 A.D. during Pratap Singh's days, there were thirteen percent of Hindu girls who had lost husbands in early childhood when they were totally ignorant of the significance of marriage ceremony or consequences of widow-hood. Equally distressing was the case of hundreds of deserted young Hindu wives whom society refused the elementary human rights of divorce and remarriage despite the fact that they were known to be innocent and had been cast aside by the caprice of heartless husbands.

Formally, the Kashmiri Hindus still held sacrosanct the scriptural injunctions recognising woman as incarnation of Shakti, the left-half of Ardanarishwara (Shiva). She was to be present at every religious ceremony and sit side by side with her husband

9. Op. cit., P.318.

at the occasion of the performance of important rituals; otherwise the celebration would be incomplete and bring no merit to the male performer. Apart from such formalism, Hindu woman was to have no part or lot in the freedom enjoyed by man. In case of the Muslims it was not very different and, indeed, in certain respects, it was worse. In comparing the merits of different religions it was trumpeted by proselytising enthusiasts that the holy Quran bestowed a high status on woman unattainable by her under any other faith, but in actual practice she was reduced to the position of bondslave. Fine and laudable sentiments are undoubtedly expressed about women in Islamic literature as in the scriptures of other religions. "Paradise lies at the feet of the mother," is the sacred text which the Muslim disputants are never weary of quoting in support of their claims, but actually the women had become domestic drudges in the valley under the Muslim rule. In both the communities birth of a girl was deemed a curse and the parents pulled long faces at it. She was called *brahm hatya* (Assasin of Brahman) by a Pandit and *qahar-i-khuda* (Wrath of God) by a Muslim. Her appearance in the world brought deep gloom to the family and intense disappointment to the relations. From birth until the moment of death her existence was lamented as an unwanted burden on the males and, sadly enough, even the women acquiesced in this insulting attitude.

As young wife, a woman was to obey implicitly the behests not only of her husband but also of his kith and kin, particularly the mother-in-law and the sister-in-law if the latter happened to be older in age than the husband. The daughter-in-law must rise early from bed, sweep every corner of the house, fetch water, cook food and do sundry menial jobs. From morning till midnight she would work like an ant. She could not talk with her husband in presence of others. Her sole aim in life was to secure the satisfaction of elders at the performance of her services. In advanced age when elders had passed away, she was to remain under the yoke of her husband, and, if perchance, she survived till old age—because widows were mercifully no more allowed to cremate themselves—she was to mould her life in accordance with the direction of her son.

Intellectual starvation was more marked and painful than physical discomfort. There was no question of educating girls or supplying any mental nourishment to them. Illiteracy was

common in all classes and communities. Even among the Kashmiri Pandits 95% of whose male population was literate and a high proportion engaged in different cultural pursuits, it would have been an agreeable surprise to meet an educated lady. In rare cases would a Hindu widow or a religious-minded Muslim girl be given some rudimentary instruction in the scriptures. Such fortunate few would recite the holy books in Sanskrit or Arabic, as the case may be, without much comprehension of the texts unintelligible to them. Generally, ignorance was regarded a virtue and the deeper it was the greater its worth and appreciation.

It was unimaginable that a woman could participate in politics or take any interest in affairs of state. She was considered totally incapable of undertaking any such task. Even in social matters of non-political character, women had little voice ; only elderly ladies possessing knowledge of old customs and conventions were consulted in matrimonial problems or subjects of like nature on occasion of weddings and other similar ceremonies.

On acquiring Kashmir through the misplaced generosity and unscrupulous politics of the British, the Dogras paid their sole attention to the consolidation of their gain. The Afghans and the Sikhs had laid the valley waste and emasculated the people. It was the ardent desire of the new masters to lay secure foundations of a vast kingdom comprising Jammu, Kashmir, Gilgit, Baltistan and as much of Tibet as they could seize by might of arms. To fulfil this ambition, they thought, they should first restore law and order in the territories that accrued to them through the Treaty of Amritsar. Having accomplished that task of primary importance the Dogras slipped into a state of complacency and forgot all about a good and progressive government, the solid basis of a secure kingdom. There is also truth in the charge that the Dogras, though well-versed in the art of fighting battles and conquering territories, were poor in the methods of good governance ; they were blissfully ignorant of the arts of peace. Gulab Singh had come in close contact with the British at Lahore and had learnt many things from them ; but the secrets of enlightened administration he had never tried to grasp nor had he imbibed any understanding of the benevolent policy which the British pursued in the rest of India. The corrosive practices, the evil customs and the unwholesome observances which were undermining society

tightened their hold on the Kashmiris ; the physical and intellectual degeneration of women touched the bottom.

Gulab Singh died in 1858 A.D. when Ranbir Singh, his son, succeeded him. He was a good-intentioned ruler desirous of achieving something noble ; he respected learning and frequently invited savants and saints to his court. But being a lover of orthodoxy and imbued with religious zeal, his vision remained circumscribed all through his life. In India, western ideas were taking long strides and spreading in all directions. Scores of arts schools and science colleges were opened by the British authorities to impart education and universities were founded in big cities like Bombay, Madras and Calcutta which were disseminating knowledge. But, living in a world of his own, Ranbir Singh did not care to start even one school where education would be introduced on modern lines. Life continued to flow in the muddy channels and the intellects of the Kashmiris, both men and women, continued to stagnate. For forty years the Dogra Rajputs had ruled Kashmir and enjoyed pleasures and luxuries which the beautiful valley could offer, and yet no improvement was effected in the material or moral condition of the people. Then, by a strange combination of circumstances, a sudden change took place which ushered in an era of progress and advancement. It moblised women no less than men ; it gave birth to a resurgence movement which in course of time swept the land, discredited the hoary institutions and awakened the community. It is now gradually bringing the Kashmiris into their own after they have wallowed in the mire of ignorance and thraldom for centuries.

CHAPTER TWELVE

NOBLE WORK OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

SOON after gifting away the valley to the Dogras as a reward for the services which Gulab Singh had rendered them, the British realised their mistake in losing the territory that was not only the most beautiful in the whole of Asia but also, strategically, the most important, situated as it was at the meeting place of three big empires—the Russian, the Chinese and the Indian. The British administrators no less than inquisitive European tourists were keen on knowing the country, the former for political and international reasons, the latter to satisfy their curiosity about fauna and flora found in the region, to enjoy scenic beauties or to hunt wild game. But the Dogras were suspicious of the white men's intentions. Having secured the valley without the consent of the Kashmiris and merely by hoodwinking the British, the Dogra rulers were reluctant to allow the Europeans to move through their newly-acquired territory and mingle with the suppressed people. To let these foreigners know what treasures were hidden behind the high mountain walls or how wretchedly the Kashmiris lived in a land so fabulously rich with the gifts of nature, was considered dangerous by the usurpers. Yet, neither Gulab Singh nor his successor Ranbir Singh could refuse every white man permission to visit the fairy land.

Some of the few adventurous persons who came and studied the conditions prevailing in the valley in the middle of the last century, published deeply interesting and illuminating accounts of their travels. These reports, whatever their political significance or historical value, brought one thing pointedly to the notice of the western philanthropists : there was a vast field

in Kashmir for energetic Christian missionaries who desired to take up humanitarian and evangelic work. In the early fifties of the last century, young men imbued with religious zeal whose lives were dedicated to the cause of the Church, arrived in India to serve the down-trodden men and women of Kashmir. But cold water was poured over their fire of enthusiasm when they were apprised of the fact that their admission into the State was subject to the will of the Maharaja and that the will was not always and easily amenable to reason. However, some of the more persevering among the missionaries eventually succeeded in currying favour with the Dogra despot. In 1854, Colonel Martin, an Army officer who had just retired from his command at Peshawar, proposed to Reverend Robert Clark of the Punjab Mission to tour Kashmir, Ladakh and Skardu; the latter readily agreed and both proceeded on the fateful journey after making adequate preparations. They were accompanied by two Indian Christians. Maharaja Gulab Singh seemingly accorded them a friendly welcome in the cynical expectation that they will return down-hearted. He is reported to have told the missionaries: "My subjects in Kashmir are very bad. I am sure that no one can do them any harm. I am rather curious to see whether the Padri Sahibs can do them any good."[1] On return, however, Clark forcefully represented the needs of the Kashmir people to the Christian Missionary Society in London. He received much support for his views from a group of leading civilians and military men including Sir Robert Montgomery, then Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, and a requisition was sent to the C. M. S. to start work in Kashmir. The Governor's donation of a thousand rupees, in aid of the proposed mission, was the nucleus of a fund that the generous liberality of friends rapidly augmented to over fourteen thousand rupees. Thereupon, C.M.S. accepted the proposal; Mr. Clark and Mr. Smith of Benaras were appointed, in 1863, to open the Mission in Kashmir. A cursory survey of the human material made it obvious that the first concern of the missionaries should be to work for the improvement in the deteriorated health of the Kashmiris. It was decided that a hospital should be founded where sick people could be given the benefit of medical advice and supplied with free medicines.

1. Quoted in *Beyond the Pir Panjal* by Ernest F. Neve, (Church Missionary Society, London, 1915), P. 68.

Needless to say that though the Dogra rule had been established for nearly two decades, the Maharaja had not cared to open a hospital, a dispensary or even a health-centre at government expense for the ailing public. The sick or the wounded had to fend for themselves and seek the aid of *hakims*, the large majority of whom was unskilled, unqualified and ignorant. It was not surprising that innumerable men and women died prematurely whose lives could have been saved by giving them timely elementary but expert medical aid. During the days of epidemics—which unfortunately broke out often—the mortality was appalling. Yet, regrettably enough, the Dogra Government put obstacles in the path of the Christian missionaries when they desired to found a hospital. Officials made common cause with both the Hindu and Muslim reactionaries in thwarting their work.

How the first attempts to carry on a systematic medical mission work were foiled may be described in the words of Robert Mark as he recorded the event in his diary in 1864 :

"The house was literary besieged with men and noisy boys. They stood by hundreds on the bridge, and lined the river on both sides, shouting, and one man striking a gong, to collect the people. Not a chuprassi, or police officer, or soldier, or official of any kind appeared. The tumult quickly increased, and no efforts were made to stop it. The people began to throw stones and some of them broke down the wall of the compound and the stables. Our servants became greatly alarmed, for they threatened to burn the house down. The number present was between one thousand and one thousand five hundred. When I went to the Wazir to ask for protection, it was said that he was asleep. He kept me waiting for two hours and then did not even give me a chair. He promised to send a guard and never did so. The police also announced that if any one rented a house to the missionaries, all the skin would be taken off their backs."[2]

Unafraid Clark remained in the valley for summer months and carried on his humanitarian work as best he could. Next year, in April 1865 A.D., despite the opposition and antagonism, he returned accompanied by his wife who started a dispensary for women almost at the exact place below Nawa Kadal where subsequently the Diamond Jubilee Zenana Hospital was opened by the Kashmir Government. But the opposition continued unabated till the end of the season harassing the missionaries.

In 1865, the Christian Missionary Society allocated a substantial sum for the medical work. Dr. Elmslie, a man of saintly nature, was deputed to found a hospital. He was a Scot and the first medical missionary to come out to India. He arrived in Srinagar in the spring. At that time no European was allowed to

2. Ibid., P. 68.

remain in the valley for the winter. Almost immediately, he met with the first of those difficulties which were caused by the suspicious Dogra administration and which beset him throughout his stay. He was disallowed to have a spacious house for conducting his duties. Incredible as it may seem today, he had patiently to take refuge under a graceful *chinar*, examine patients, give advice and administer medicine. Likewise, he did the operation work in the open. And when he left Kashmir at the close of the season, the Governor of Kashmir told the owner of the house which Dr. Elmslie had occupied as residence, that he was on no account to let it again to the doctor the following year. Unable to obtain adequate accommodation next year too the good doctor pitched a tent and used it for both out-patients and in-patients. During that season he had, however, 3365 sick men and women to treat. For four seasons Dr. Elmslie either roamed about the valley or sat under convas restoring health and happiness to thousands of Kashmiris of both sexs and all classes. He worked single handed and it is remarkable that despite local prejudice and opposition of the Authority, he made the mission a success. Sick people increasingly flocked to him and before long the allopathic treatment as well as the Christian missionaries became popular in the land of Lalla Rukh.

The strain, however, proved too much for Dr. Elmslie and before he could see the fructification of his desire to found a hospital, he died in 1872. The noble task was accomplished by his immediate successor Dr. Theodore Maxwell whose forbearance and patience were exemplary. He was a nephew of General John Nicholson and, therefore, commanded respect in the Kashmir officialdom. Besides, the selfless labours of the missionaries and their endearment among the common men and women in the valley had chastened the heart of the Dogras and slackened the opposition. Furthermore, as an indirect result of the activities of the missionaries, the government started the first State dispensary at Srinagar in 1870 which proved a forerunner of the present State Medical Services.

Four years later, in 1874, Maharaja Ranbir Singh granted to the Christian Mission an ideal site—ideal from health point of view—on Rustum Gaddi Hill near the Dal Gate, for the construction of the hospital, and at State expence a building was erected at the spot. For about three-quarters of a century the Mission Hospital became a place of asylum to the

poverty-stricken, suffering and friendless men and women of the valley. Those who were declared incurable resorted to this health-centre to seek remedy and relief. Two brothers Dr. Arthur Neve and Dr. Ernest F. Neve who worked in the hospital for more than two decades earned deep affection of the Kashmiris ; they were looked upon as celestial physicians and best friends by the poorest and the humblest. Arthur died in Kashmir and lies buried in the Christian cemetery at Sheikh Bagh. Never could any government hospital rise so high in the estimation of the Kashmiris as did this Drugjan Hospital, as it was popularly known, till it remained under the management of the Christian missionaries. It was a boon to the ailing sections of both the sexes. In 1949, the hospital was taken over by the State authorities and converted into a special sanitorium for the victims of tuberculosis.

The movement of moral and material uplift received impetus when Church of England Zenana Missionary Society decided to lend a helping hand in Kashmir work. Another hospital, exclusively for women, was founded at Rainawari. It rendered great service to Kashmiri women and earned equal fame. Among the lady missionaries whose devotion to the cause of women's health deserves to be recorded are Miss Butler, a lady doctor, Miss Erene Patric and Miss Robinson, trained nurses, who laid down their lives while on duty in the valley. Another good soul was Miss Kate Knowles M.B. who worked in the beginning of the present century, to cater for the needs of women in Srinagar.

The approbation of the Kashmiris to the regeneration plans and the ever-growing popularity of the medical work, encouraged the Christian missionaries to pay attention to the staggering problem of mass illiteracy. The Dogra Government was equally indifferent to intellectual advancement and physical welfare of the people. Until 1880, not a single school had been started even in the capital to impart literacy. The upper and the middle classes were, as of yore, getting their children educated in *muktabs* and *pathshalas* run by the professional teachers such as *mullahs, akhunds* and *purohits.* No aid was given to these institutions and no supervision made by the authorities ; indeed there was no department of the State dealing with public instruction.

The Christian missionaries drew up plans tor founding a

school and forwarded them to C. M. S. in London. These were promptly approved and funds granted liberally for the purpose. Many years had to be spent in preparation to dispel ignorance, fight prejudice and allay distrust before a primary school could be started. For, in this adventure, the missionaries had to face a fiercer antagonism from both the Dogra rulers and the obscuranist, orthodox and reactionary classes of the Kashmiris who wielded enough political power and social influence to frustrate the scheme. Time and again, the determined missionaries made attempts to get the school going but as often the enemies of progress foiled them in their endeavours. Finally, perseverance and patience triumphed when, one fine morning in 1881, Rev. J. H. Knowles gathered a number of boys and youths who displayed some eagerness to learn the three R's. Little can we imagine the joy with which the Reverend Father beamed when the Kashmiri pupils consented to read English under him provided by doing so they were not converted to the faith of Christianity.

The opening of the C.M.S. School was a red-letter day in the annals of modern Kashmir ; its significance can not be overestimated ; it would be no exaggeration to say that it has ushered in a new scientific age in the valley. The establishment of the school on modern lines with the purpose of imparting scientific education and disseminating liberal knowledge and culture may be compared with two other outstanding events in Kashmir History : the introduction of Buddhism by Emperor Ashoka in third century B.C. and the acceptance of Islam at the hands of Bulbul Shah by Rinchana in the fourteenth century A.D. While the two revolutionary creeds, in their respective days, changed the entire complexion of Kashmir society through mass conversions, the spread of modern education is building new men and women out of the dead mass to which civil wars and continuous foreign domination spreading over a period of centuries had reduced the people of the valley.

Within a brief period of ten years the C.M.S. Primary School was, by degrees, raised to the high standard and the number of students could be counted in hundreds. It was a truly phenomenal success. When Rev. C.E. Tyndale Biscoe, the unforgettable benefactor of the Kashmiris, joined the school in 1891 A.D. to assist Rev. Knowles, there were no less than 250 students on its rolls. Without in any way coercing or even zealously

persuading the people to accept their faith, the Christian missionaries thoughtfully reared a group of young men whose belief in many age-old superstitions, dogmas and irrational ideals was gradually crumbling and who looked at life and its problems from a different angle. Year after year, the school turned out men gifted with an entirely new outlook on life who spread far and wide in the country as teachers, officials, traders, artisans or as professionals. The products of the Mission School were talking a different language and behaving in a novel, unorthodox and nonconformist manner. An intellectual revolution born in the class-rooms of the institution was slowly travelling in diverse directions and was imperceptibly bringing the whole society in its vortex.

The success that attended the efforts of the missionaries in both medical and educational enterprises further emboldened them to attack the citadel of women's colossal ignorance. To make timid female patients attending the hospital feel at home and be comfortable, one or two lady missionaries had arrived from abroad to assist the doctors. It struck them that they should do something to teach girls at least the rudiments of learning. With the consultation of a few of their bolder acquaintances, the ladies decided to open a girls school. Such a thing was unheard of in the God-forsaken land and even a suggestion to educate girls was sure to arouse suspicion and invite trouble. To give Christian (western) education to boys was objectionable enough, though sufferable, but, to pollute the minds of virgin girls with the impure ideas from foreign lands was something beyond tolerance. There was many-pronged opposition and to less courageous crusaders the task would have appeared well-nigh impossible of accomplishment. But it was different with mettlesome Christian missionaries. Through brave spirit, unruffled mind and inexhaustible patience they removed one impediment after another that was placed in their path and ultimately came out with flying colours in the struggle.

Sometime in 1893 or 1895 (it is difficult to be sure about the exact date), a girl school was started quite adjacent to the thriving boys school. Persuasion, blandishments and appeal to sense of patriotism were utilised to prepare some parents for admitting their tiny girls in it. A few students were enrolled who actually attended the first class. But there were murmurs and whispers in streets, at homes and on shops which soon created

excitement in the locality. Finding a fertile ground for their activities, the mischief-mongers sedulously spread lies to harm the new-born institution. It, however, took time for the poisonous seed to germinate and grow. The goodwill earned by the missionaries during the long period of thirty years stood them in good stead and the intrepid women went on doing their work for some months unmindful of what the evil-intentioned people wanted to do. But the inescapable ordeal for the lady in charge of the school at last arrived. We can do no better than state the event in the words of Rev. Biscoe :

"It was somewhere in the nineties that one of the mission ladies started a girl school in the city ; it was of course by no means popular, as it shocked the prejudices of all proper thinking folk in Srinagar. The girls who were brave enough to attend were very timid, and their parents were somewhat on the shake, as public opinion was very much against them. The school continued until the first prize day. The Superintendent had invited some of the European ladies of the station to come to the function, thinking it would be an encouragement to the girls and their parents. All the girls were assembled in the school when, on the appearance of the English lady visitors, some one in the street shouted out that the Europeans had come to kidnap the girls. Others took up the cry, and ran to the school windows and told the girls to escape by jumping from the windows, the men below catching them as they fell. Before the visitors could enter the school the scholars had literally flown ; the girls of course lost their heads on account of the shoutings from the street. It was terrible moment for the Superintendent as she saw her girls disappear out of the windows, for she feared that they would be damaged by the fall. It is said that one of the lady visitors was wearing rather a wonderful hat, which upset the equilibrium of the citizens who were standing outside the school."[3]

Such mischiefs could hamper growth and retard progress but they did little to frustrate the missionaries' indomitable will. The lady workers no doubt experienced grave setbacks but they refused to surrender. Faith in the righteousness of their cause and dogged perseverance in pursuit of their objective, overcame the die-hard prejudice of the Kashmiris. A few weeks later the school reopened and it was surprising to find that more girls were learning lessons in it than were seen in the class-rooms previously. Never again did the mischief-mongers succeed in upsetting the plans of the Superintendent.

Among the heroic souls who braved the roughest weather in making girls education acceptable in Sringar, were Miss Churchill Taylor, Miss Stubbs and Miss Goodall. All glory to them for the pioneer work they did in the cause of Kashmiri women.

3. C. E. Tyndale Biscoe, *Kashmir in Sunlight & Shade.* (Seeley, Service & Co., London, 1925), Pp. 257-258.

No sooner was the first C.M.S. Girls School well established and on its way to progress than another school was opened by the Christian missio naries and attached to the Boys School. Thenceforth the work made smooth advance year after year. In the beginning of the present century, the Mission Society had extended the sphere of their activities to towns like Anant Nag and Baramulla. A Boys School had been started at the former place which was running splendidly. Not to neglect the girls, the Mission opened a school for them too which almost from the outset enrolled a good number of scholars. At the turn of the century, Father Brauer arrived in the valley and pitched his tents in Baramulla with the purpose of founding the St. Josph Convent. A couple of years later, in 1903, he was joined by J.P. Boland, a teacher in Murree, when both together started a school for boys which in course of time flowered into a co-educational college imparting learning to young people in and around the ancient town. Finding that the local female population was in dire need of medical aid, the missionaries opened a women's hospital within the premises of the convent where lady doctors devotedly treated patients belonging to the indigent, poor and starving classes. The nuns, sisters and nurses of the convent soon earned the affection of the Kashmiris ; reputation of the hospital spread far and wide in the countryside and thousands of ailing women and sick children flocked to the centre to regain lost health.

Imperceptibly but surely, the mission hospitals and girls schools wrought an astonishing change in the physical appearance and the mental outlook of womenfolk. From untidy, timid, fretful girls the schools transformed some of them into clean, self-reliant and sensitive maidens who knew how to enjoy life and how to be of service to themselves, to their relations and to society.

Medical assistance in hospitals and teaching in schools were not the only tasks which lady missionaries performed in the valley to uplift down-trodden women. Some of them were engaged in visiting homes of hospital patients, girl students or other friendly-disposed people to help them in diverse ways. On the occasion of these visits, besides cheering up the morose spirits, the missionaries gave much needed advice on domestic hygeine, personal cleanliness, nutritious diet, precautions during pregnancy, care after child-birth, upbringing of babies and many other topics of vital importance. Mere meeting with the

educated and courageous ladies who had left homes to serve humanity in far off lands stirred the slumbering spirits of Kashmiri women. Slowly an idea was beginning to grow in their minds that all women were not born to be goods and chattels; it was not their fore-ordained destiny to undergo life-long suffering; they could also be as bold and free as these women from abroad. Not without due caution, the lady missionaries too provoked such revolutionary thinking on the part of Kashmiri women. Miss E.G. Hull who laboured for a decade to bring light and happiness to the women half a century ago, was a welcome visitor in both humble and rich homes. She was freely admitted into the zenana of even the upper class Muslims and orthodox *pirs*. When in 1809 ill health forced her to retire and return home in England many women lamented over it.[4]

The story of the struggle of foreign lady missionaries against male arrogance and distrust, racial and religious prejudice, deep ignorance and truculent authority, forms a glorious chapter in the history of cultural renaissance in Kashmir. Many have been the noble souls who have worked calmly but unflinchingly in face of grave provocation and danger so that our womenkind may awaken and come into their own. The ladies have voluntarily shared privation, meekly borne tortures and quietly executed menial jobs in order that, as a fruit of this devotion and selfless labour, the suppressed daughters of the Vitasta may someday regain their lost stature. Notable among these magnanimous servants of humanity are Miss Fitze, Miss Coverdale, Miss Gomery and Miss Mallinson. Kashmiri women will ever remain under a great debt of gratitude to them all.

Had the Hindu Dogra rulers been endowed with intelligence, they would have learned from the Christian missionaries the ways of uplifting the fallen people over whom destiny had brought them to rule. They would have formulated plans for improving public health, for spreading education and for reviving cultural pursuits. Missionaries were handicapped by obvious limitations and were unable to take up the work on an extensive scale. But the Government, had it desired so, could have spread a network of schools and dispensaries for the moral and physical welfare of the millions. Kashmir was a fertile land and the amount of revenue collected by the rulers was not small. But the

4. It is interesting to read her book *Vignettes of Kashmir* protraying condition of Kashmiri women in the beginning of the present century.

Dogras were neither efficient and intelligent nor wise and sympathetic towards their subject races. The awareness that they were Hindus and the over-whelming majority of the Kashmiris professed Islam, constantly made them apprehensive; they disliked the idea of making their subjects politically conscious and thought that imparting of education was only an effective way of awakening the people to their political and human rights. Even when, belatedly, a few boys schools were started in the city to meet the repeated charges of anti-progress, no steps were taken to make them attractive or to get students enrolled in large numbers. No wonder that the success of the Christian missionaries in their endeavours annoyed the Dogra rulers and the State Government placed greater impediments in their path.

But the missionaries had powerful friends in high places at the headquarters of the Central Government. Besides, many eminent tourists who were reluctantly allowed to travel through the valley, wrote privately to the British authorities in India and London, depicting the backward nature of the country and how the Dogras seemed determined to keep the people in a state of ignorance and servitude. For years the British Viceroy and his advisers were loath to take any remedial measures, but at the close of Ranbir Singh's rule in the early eighties of the last century, Czarist Russia's intrigues on the N.W. Frontier made the British alive to the danger of having an inefficient and unpopular administration in Kashmir. In their own imperial interests, the Government of India were forced to move and, suddenly, drastic steps were taken, in 1885, at the accession of Pratap Singh to the throne. To begin with, a British Resident was thrust upon the protesting Maharaja and stationed at Srinagar. That imperial representative was to be the adviser-in-chief whose opinion was virtually a command which the Maharaja could not afford to disregard.

The interference in the internal administration, unwarranted though it was in view of the Treaty of Amritsar, and deeply resented by the Maharaja and nationalist circles all over India, proved a blessing to the people of the State. Almost immediately basic changes were introduced in the policy of the Government. Among other things attention was paid to the neglected problems of public health and mass illiteracy. The whole system began to be re-oriented. When a little later the British Viceroy,

acting on the advice tendered by his Political Department, forced Pratap Singh to appoint a council consisting of the nominees of the Government of India, which was empowered to deal with all State affairs, with the Maharaja as a mere figure-head, the pace of reform and advancement was accelerated. Educated, trained and experienced people were imported to replace the officers whose only qualification was that they belonged to the ruling class or were the favourites of the Maharaja.

Within a few years of the establishment of the new regime, things in Kashmir assumed a touch of modernism. A moiety of public revenues was expended on nation-building works. In 1889 a building was constructed on the bank of the Vitasta, two furlongs above Amira Kadal bridge, to house a hospital equipped with latest medical instruments ; and trained doctors from the Punjab and Bengal were appointed to look after the health of the people. The capital was gifted with a nominated municipal committee to conduct the civic affairs of the city. A few years later, in 1896, a zenana hospital was founded just below Nawa Kadal in memory of the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria's rule.

Women's education was a difficult problem to tackle. Experience had taught the British administrators that they should tread such slippery paths very cautiously and it was deemed advisable not to give the backward people any cause for offence. So the policy pursued by the State Council, in the beginning, was to assist the Missionary Society to take up the cause of the girls, as they had of the boys, in giving education on scientific lines. As a matter of fact, it was this hopeful and enlightened policy which encouraged the missionary ladies in 1893 to start a primary school for girls in the capital.

Nevertheless, it was evident that the purpose of educating the girls on a mass scale could not be fulfilled through the agency of the Christian Missionary Society. Apart from the inherent defects and shortcomings in the missionary system, it was the primary responsibility of the Government to educate the subjects of the State belonging to either sex. When fierceness in public opposition had disappeared and the three missionary girls schools were well established, the State Government felt that the climate was favourable enough for it to start a few schools of its own in the city and, if possible, in the big towns.

In 1912, the educational authorities appointed a mixed committee of officials and non-officials to go into the matter and report whether the time was opportune for opening girls schools in the State. The members of the committee included Dr. Duni-Chand, Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Kulbhushan, Health Officer, Mr. Nanda, Divisional Engineer, P.W.D., Mr. Shankar Koul, Head Master C.M.S. School, besides the President and a member of the Srinagar Municipal Committee. After many months of deliberations and consultations, the committee submitted an unanimous report to the Maharaja strongly recommending that two schools should be started in the cities of Srinagar and Jammu to bring the State in line with the rest of India in the sphere of female education. But Pratap Singh remained unconvinced and much pressure had to be exerted on him before he agreed to sanction the proposal.

The Government was, however, faced with peculiar difficulties. It had no doubt become easy to collect scholars, but it was not so easy to secure the services of adequately educated women to function as teachresses. The number of those Kashmiri girls, products of the mission schools, who, though not so well-up, might yet have been able to take lower classes, was small. Also, they declined, under social pressure, to serve and earn. They were not to blame. Among the signs of decline of a community is the perversity in thinking of its members. While ignorance was hailed as a bliss, to be a teachress was viewed as a stigma by the benighted Kashmiris. Slander and calumny were the common lot of poor teachresses in the dark days and indeed until very recent times in the valley.

The small class of Pandits is known to be an intellectual section espousing progressive ideas in Kashmir. It is the legitimate claim of the Pandits that they are the most educated community in the State; more than 95% of their males are literate, a large number being highly educated. The State authorities, therefore, reasonably thought of making a start with a primary girls school for Hindus at Fateh Kadal in the heart of the city. Muslims were considered too backward to look favourably at the experiment. Two brothers, Hargopal Kaul and Jankinath Kaul, both public-spirited lawyers, voluntarily co-operated with the educational officers in opening the school. The first Kashmiri Pandit lady who had the honour to give lessons to girls was Tekri. She was impelled by a burning

desire to serve the cause of education and volunteered to work in the school. For some time she was all alone to hear the taunts and gibes of myopic social reactionaries. But she stood firm and worked with distinction till the early twenties. In Srinagar she was a familiar figure known as Tekri Master.

Hargopal's daughter, Padmavati (affectionately called Nanni), who became a widow in childhood was educated privately. Defying the hostile public opinion, the liberal father offered the services of the bold girl as a teacher of the school which was later on shifted to Chinkral Mohalla and raised to the middle standard. Padmavati served uninterruptedly as Head Teacher of the school for over a quarter-century and honourably retired only when old age incapacitated her for further work. The Chinkral Mohalla Government Girls School was known among Kashmiri women as Nanni's Chathal (School) and it was here that first batches of girls received their lessons in the three R's besides some instruction in handicrafts like tailoring and embroidery.

To keep a strict watch over the functioning of the school and to create confidence in the minds of the suspicious and orthodox parents, the educational authorities constituted a non-official advisory committee composed of influential men including lawyers, traders, landlords and hereditary dignitaries. Public-spirited local officials were also associated with the committee. The Koul brothers were the two most indefatigable members of the committee. As a matter of fact, in earlier years, first Hargopal and afterwards Jankinath, presided over the deliberations of the committee and managed the affairs of the school. As an associate member of the committee, I knew the latter intimately and can speak with personal knowledge of the multitudinous problems that faced the pioneers of girls education in the twenties.

In course of time, the Government started a Muslim school in Srinagar with an advisory committee of liberal Muslims to look after it. Needless to say that the difficulties encountered by the Muslim educationists were in no way less formidable than those confronted by the Hindus; they were of a similar nature and of the same magnitude.

The medium of instruction in the Hindu schools was Hindi in Devnagri script but in the Muslim schools it was Urdu in Persian

script. A common language and script was considered impracticable at that stage because Kashmiri was not regarded even as a dialect by the rulers of the country.

By 1920, apparently, girls education had registered some progress. Besides the three mission schools, a new non-denominational high school run directly by the State Education Department, a Muslim School and five Hindu schools (three of Middle standard) were functioning in different parts of Srinagar. But in reality the schools were so only in name ; the speed of progress was discouragingly slow. One could not find a single matriculate among the girls who had left portals of these educational institutions ; the number of those who had passed the Middle Standard examination too was not large.

It is true the people in the valley had begun to recognise the value of female education, but it was still debated whether it would be wise to give only religions teaching to girls or to educate than on modern scientific lines. Further, if the latier course is preferred, was it advisable to aducate them equally highly like boys. Generally, it was believed that it would be sufficient for a girl to learn arithmatic and study some religious scriptures. Male distrust and selfishness considered it dangerous to give university education to them. But, debates apart, there were difficulties in the way of even accomplishing the little about which no two opinions existed. Girls in average Kashmiri homes assisted mothers in domestic work and could not be spared for the "luxury" of reading in schools ; only such tiny children were sent to attend classes as were not needed at home. The attendance was most irregular and parents cared little. No one was prepared to spend money on books and other requirements. Above all, there were few teachresses adequately trained to create interest in the minds of students for studies or benefit the scholars in other ways. Hundreds of girls were known to attend the classes for years without learning anything.

In the twenties, Kashmir was in ferment ; torces were developing in the womb of the old society which suddenly exploded into the gigantic upheavel of 1931. One of the results was the realisation by the Kashmiris that education of women was essential for the regeneration of the community and renaissance of national culture. It is the story of outcome of this awareness which will be related in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

YEARS OF RESURGENCE

EARLY in the current century, Mrs. Annie Besant, then President of the Theosophical Society, paid a visit to Kashmir and, with the active co-operation of her admirers, laid the foundation of a Hindu college in Srinagar for the advancement of higher education among the youth. She was desirous of founding an educational institute for girls also but she did not find time propitious enough for the purpose and while inaugurating the boys college, the learned benefactress warned the Kashmiris that unless women advanced side by side with men, the society, as a whole, would not make much progress. The import of the sage words was fully grasped by the people two decades after they were uttered.

The college founded by the luminaries of the Theosophical Society was subsequently taken over by the State authorities and rechristianed Sri Pratap College in the name of the then ruler, Maharaja Pratap Singh. It was affiliated to the Punjab University and prepared students for Arts degrees. In the beginning, for many years, the number of scholars was limited and they came almost exclusively from the Hindu community. The first batch of graduates left the portals of the college in 1912 and were hailed as heralds of a new era by their countrymen. In the twenties the number of highly educated young men had multiplied and a few of them have had the good fortune to proceed abroad for receiving training in different branches of technology.

Meanwhile, girls had made only an insignificant progress in education. They continued to be steeped in ignorance, stagnating in the back-waters of social and religious conservatism. The

evil practice of early marriage was common. It was an unusual sight to see a boy of any well-to-do family unmarried at the age of fifteen; custom disapproved of keeping a girl under parental roof after she had passed twelve summers of life. It was a sin to have a virgin of marriagable age in the house. After performance of nuptials, while the boy-husband could still continue his education, the girl-wife had to assist her mother-in-law in domestic chores. Thus the two minds developed differently and gradually achasm yawned between the two mental outlooks. Soon there were hundreds of couples in Kashmiri homes which, though tied to each other by marriage laws and social customs, actually lived in different worlds. Husbands and wives enjoyed only creature comforts in common; so far as ideas and opinions were concerned, they moved in spheres which were exclusive to each other. There was lop-sided growth, an imbalance between man and woman and it was evident this disparity could not allow happy and harmonious homes to be built.

For only literate or partly educated young men it was not very difficult to live with illiterate wives. But for those who were highly educated, particularly the youths who studied outside Kashmir in the big Indian cities like Lahore, Calcutta and Bombay or in the foreign universities and returned adorned with degrees and diplomas, to share life with ignorant, superstitious women, was an ordeal. The union could never be of equals ; it became partnership of master and slave even when the educated youth bowed before the supremacy of custom. In many cases the bond of marriage was dishonourd and the helpless wife deserted. Evidently the society was ailing and the sensitive patriot could not help seeing that girls education was the direst need of the times ; else the nation must fall apart.

Failure of the governmental agency to successfully tackle the problem was notorious and few had any hopes that in the foreseeable future the percentage of educated girls would register a marked rise if things were allowed to move as slowly as they did. It was manifest that without self-help there would be no satisfactory progress. Several attempts were made to open private schools but the same causes which had defeated the government also foiled the patriots. Promoters of women's education were caught in a vicious circle : girls could not be educated unless there were capable teachresses to instruct them and teachresses would be forthcoming only after a sufficient

number of girls was educated in schools. In solving the problem, the theosophists again came to the assistance of the Kashmir people. This was the time when momentous events were taking place in India. Annie Besant had entered politics and, in 1917, she was elected the first woman president of the Indian National Congress. In the same year she founded, with the help of Dr. Margaret Cousins, the Indian Women's Association in Madras, which became a model for women's institutions elsewhere.

Annie Besant had been keeping a constant watch over the developments in the valley and from time to time advising the local theosophists to do something for the uplift of local women. As Congress President she laid greater stress on the work ; but nothing was done for many years ; the courage to face public opprobrium was lacking. The ferment of the twenties, however, generated a favourable climate and a need was felt of more girls schools.

Then, after pondering over the problem for months, a few Kashmiri theosophists embarked, in September 1926, on an adventure well-conceived in design and boldi n execution. They had the benefit of the guidance of Dr. Margaret E. Cousins who, together with her noble husband Dr. Cousins, had dedicated herself to the cause of cultural resurgence in India. An organisation known as the Women's Welfare Trust was formed with the object of "advancing the welfare of the Kashmiri women by imparting to them knowledge, by stimulating home industry among them and by promoting their physical health and well-being." The founder members of the Trust were : (1) Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins, (2) Mrs. L. D. Van. Gheel Gildemeester, (3) Sri Kantha Toshakhani, (4) Shridhar Kaul Dulloo and (5) Aftab Koul Nizamat. The Trust formulated several plans for the advancement of Kashmiri women, the most important of them all being education of both girls and adults. Of the five trustees, Margaret Cousins could not personally attend to its work from far off Adyar (Madras) where she lived at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society. Her other pressing engagements in connection with All India Women's Association too prevented her from actively associating herself with the work of the Trust. She was, however, always available for giving mature advice and timely guidance. The work was taken up in right earnest by Professor Toshakhani and Aftab Koul Nizamat. It was Toshakhani's uncommon mental vigour and profound faith in

the cause of women that put the Trust on its legs. He reared the organisation during its formative period as a father would bring up his own child.

Aftab Koul Nizamat was the heart and soul of the Women's Welfare Trust. It was the passion of his life to labour, night and day, for the progress of the institution. He was not highly educated in the formal sense, being only a matriculate; and he was a subordinate official in the Audit Department of the Kashmir Government. But a patriot par excellence, he was a visionary who felt happy to dream about the bright future of a free Kashmir in which women would find an honoured and a glorious place. Born in 1889, Nizamat was educated in the C.M.S High School. A devoted theosophist for thirty-five years, he became the Secretary (1925) and the Vice-President (1948) of the Kashmir Lodge. Such was his ardent desire to see Kashmiri women restored to a position of dignity that almost every minute of his waking life, when off his official duties, he would spend in doing the Trust work. Indifferent to praise or censure, to encomium or slander, to applause or abuse, which all were his lot in lesser or greater measure, he laboured incessantly for the cause till the very day of his death on 30th May 1954. I came in close contact with him and had the pleasure to watch him work for years. I can say that among the builders of modern Kashmir who are not much known but who are entitled to the gratitude of posterity, Aftab Koul Nizamat is surely one. If ever we decide to construct a temple of fame for the illustrious sons and daughters who lived and died for the welfare of humanity and freedom of the Kashmiris, this nable soul should have a niche reserved for him in it.

Besides Toshakhani and Nizamat other notable leaders of the Trust were Iravati Mehta, (wife of V.N. Mehta, Revenue Minister 1932-1937), Mrs L. Purbi (wife of A.N. Purbi, Inspector-General of Customs), and R.C. Kak, Prime Minister. Its present President and Secretary are Tara Chand Wazir, retired Director of Industries, and D.N. Dhar, respectively.

It would be enjoyable for me to write and interesting for the reader to study the history of Women's Welfare Trust; but space forbids to attempt such a task. However, even a brief account should be quite revealing. The Trust made a humble beginning by starting a primary girls school with five students on its roll and one teacher to instruct them. The venture was an act of

wisdom because suitable male teachers were employed for the first time to meet the dearth of the teachresses. In view of rank conservatism of the people and strictness of purdah observed in Kashmiri homes it was a daring step. Subsequently however events proved that the times had ripened and the sponsors of the movement had correctly fathomed the public mind; the immediate response to the clarion-call was by no means disappointing. Within a brief period of four years, the number of schools managed by the Trust rose to ten (six primary, three middle and one high) and the number of students on the rolls was no fewer than 575. It was more encouraging than the most optimistic among the trustees had expected.

In the formulation of the aims and plans of the Women's Welfare Trust one fact was remarkable and would never be too repeatedly mentioned. Though all the local trustees professed a particular creed, the organisation and its work were wisely kept free from any taint of sectarian bias. Twenties of the current century were full of communal bickerings and turmoil in India; the virus of Hindu-Muslim antagonism had spread in Kashmir too. Therefore, it was an instance of exceptional clear vision to lay the foundation of an educatioual organisation of non-communal charecter and carry on its work on the high level of humanity.

There were some misgivings and many throbbings of heart when, in 1929, the trustees, emboldened by success, decided to start the first Muslim school. The very idea to have a male teacher for imparting instruction to Muslim girls was startling. There was no dearth of calumniators to poison the minds of parents. But the trustees took the bold step and, to the astonishment of many, the Muslim School was no less a success than the Hindu schools.

Kashmir is a land of surprises even to its own people who never care to study the past history and culture of their country. Temperamentally, traditionally and culturally, the Kashmiris are neither intolerant nor religion-ridden. Communal animosity is an imported curse which visits them during spells of lunacy when they forget themselves. In normal times, the Kashmiris, both Hindus and Muslims, behave so admirably that those who have only superficial knowledge of their past and the cravings that lie hidden in their hearts are simply puzzled.

The teachers of the Trust schools were better qualified than

the teachresses available during those days ; therefore they proved more efficient and capable. Without exception, all of them volunteered to serve on meagre salaries which sacrifice helped the Management to extend the field of activities in a short duration. To shut the mouths of scandal-mongers the Trust made a provision for at least one *purohit* as Hindi teacher in every Hindu school and one *mullah* as instructor in Arabic in every Muslim school. Under the fostering wings of these religion-apparelled men modern education was taught to multitudes of tiny girls and budding maidens.

The medium of instruction was the national language, Kashmiri, in the primary classes. With his remarkable aptitude for educational reform, Prof. Toshakhani prepared a set of elementary readers in Devanagri script for teaching Kashmiri in Hindu schools. It was the claim of the trustees that a girl could become literate in Kashmiri only in forty days according to the syllabus chalked out for the schools. This was not devoid of truth. Girls in these schools enjoyed to read with zest, first sentences and later on stories, in their mother tongue of which the students in the State girs schools were deprived, because the medium of instruction in the latter was Hindi or Urdu and not Kashmiri.

I joined the staff of the Women's Welfare Trust in August 1930 as Supervisor of the schools at the call of Nizamat. There were few fields in the valley then where an aspiring patriot could usefully utilise his energy in promoting social good. I was quite young, bubbling with enthusiasm and wondering how I could profitably occupy myself. Not much persuasion was therefore needed to allure me to join the Trust. But I was not destined to work in the schools for more than a year. For soon the upheaval of 1931 claimed me ; I had reluctantly to take leave of the organisation in July next year and to plunge into the whirlpool of politics from which I have not been able to extricate myself till this day. However, the days and months I spent in managing the schools and supervising the studies of nearly 1000 girls were full of intense activity and deep joy. I felt delighted to be among the rising generation and was pleased to know that I was doing my humble bit for the uplift of women. What made the work most congenial for me was the secular character of the schools and the healthy, rational attitude of the trustees. From top to bottom the organisation was free from the

obnoxious spirit of petty, sordid communalism. I got ample opportunity to study the sentiments and feelings of Hindu and Muslim girls; often I exchanged views with their parents. In August 1930, when I joined the Trust there were nine schools (three of middle and six of primary standard).

The schools, as will have been observed by the reader, were of denominational character; six Hindu and three Muslim. Perhaps there was some prudence in making them so; or was it the timidity of the trustees which disallowed them to be out and out non-communal? It is very difficult to judge. After I joined, another primary school for Hindu girls was started at Shital Nath. I would have liked to convert the schools into mixed ones where both Hindu and Muslim girls could have mingled and forgotten the religious or social differences that separated them; at any rate, it was my intention to start some schools where girls would be admitted without any distinction of creed. But before I could submit my proposals to the trustees politics overtook me. However, happily, a high school of my dreams was started in 1934 by the Trust.

In the absence of a mixed school a gathering was arranged every week or fortnightly when nearly 100 girls from different schools assembled in the spacious compound of the Vastanta School at Kral Khud. Here they learned to know each other and hear diverse views on social topics. These regular meetings led to the formation of Kashmir Girls Association.

In earlier days, the Trust employed only Hindu teachers in the Hindu schools and Muslim teachers in the Muslim schools. Not infrequently it so happened that capable men from a particular community were not forthcoming on the meagre salaries that the institution could offer. This was especially the case with the Muslims; for educated members of the community were allured by better salaries of government jobs for which Muslims were in greater demand. Not without some hesitation, another bold step was taken when, early in 1931, Hindu young men were appointed in the Muslim Middle School where many grown-up girls were studying. We had been warned by wiseacres that this would be resented by Muslims and might prove risky. It was dinned into our ears that the Muslims were excitable and deeply suspicious where the question of women was concerned. But to our joy and to the chagrin of such innocent or deliberate vilifiers not a murmur was heard in any quarter.

Indeed, I remember, as the quality of instruction improved by the arrangement, we were congratulated by the parents for having introduced the change. It is gratifying to recall that when the valley was spasmodically rocked by communal passions from July 1931 onwards and at times mutual confidence of the Hindus and Muslims was put to severe strain, the Pandit teachers unswervingly continued to work at their posts and neither were they molested nor was any complaint made to the Trust against anyone of them.

There is no denying the fact that the bold adventure of the patriotic educationists was proving a tremendous success. Before long authorities had to recognise that where others had failed in face of manifold difficulties, the Trust was able to remove several impediments and forge ahead. The Chief Inspectress of the government girls schools acknowledged in one of her writings that "the teachings and the results of the Trust Schools are much better than I have found in the government schools."[1]

The increasing popularity of the girls schools encouraged the members of the Trust to turn their attention to the problem of adult illiteracy. In summer 1930, an adult school with three young women, Sidha Lakshmi, Posha Kujji and Radha Mal, was opened in a room of Nizamat's own house. Two of the more efficient and exceptionally mild-mannered and suave teachers, working in the girls schools, were nominated to take the class. On my joining the staff I was specially alloted the task of teaching arithmatic and domestic science to the students besides keeping a personal vigilance over the general functioning of the school. There was scepticism about the future of the new enterprise ; even the most earnest among the sympathisers of the movement doubted whether the class could run successfully.

In 1931, Kashmir women above twenty years of age felt shy to learn reading and writing, much more so when asked to attend a school. Slanderers and gossip-mongers disheartened them by their idle talk ; conservative elders and relatives disapproved of it. Besides, average Kashmiri woman is so tied up with domestic work that few people believed that even the three ladies would continue to attend the class regularly. Imagine then the pleasure it gave us all when, only after four months, the number of scholars in the adult school increased to fifteen. All of them had not to begin from the beginning ; a few had been

1. Quoted by Iravati Mehta in *Appeal for Funds* dated August 6, 1938.

learning lessons at home and had studied upto different grades though none further than the 4th standard. Most of the scholars were virgin widows in their twenties ; some had babies in their arms ; two or three were elderly women with grown-up children. As applications poured in for more admissions, the school was shifted to a rented house in an adjacent vicinity. It was formally called Seva Sadan. There were thirty-two women on its rolls when I left the Trust in July 1931.

Seva Sadan developed into a notable institution and achieved much importance in subsequent years. A committee of tried and experienced public workers was nominated to conduct its affairs. For many years the well known Congress leader, Rameshwari Nehru, functioned as the president of the committee. Seva Sadan became a centre for poor, destitute but struggling women who aspired to become self-supporting. The syllabus of the school included handicrafts and tailoring besides instruction in three R's. One of the main aims in founding it had been to train teachresses who would gradually replace the teachers in the Trust girls schools. That purpose remained unfulfilled to a large extent but many Seva Sadan products were recruited in government schools and other private teaching institutions.

Apart from the academic activities of the schools, the Trust sponsored a Women's League with the object of holding debates and discussions on such topics as social evils, unhealthy customs, causes of prevalent diseases, role of patriotic women in the reform movement and the methods to achieve all-round progress. Ranim Ded Razdan was the President and Devki Koul (wife of Aftab Koul Nizamat) the Secretary of the League. Under the auspices of this organisation were arranged dramatic performances and lantern-slide shows in pursuit of the aforementioned aims. Usually hundreds of women attended the public meetings of the League ; in case some exciting subject was under debate the whole show was conducted by the men-workers ; women being still incapable of organising or controlling public functions. Nevertheless, the League was successful in planting new ideas in the minds of women.

Meanwhile, the policy of Kashmir Government towards women's education had not remained unaffected.

Maharaja Hari Singh came to the throne of Kashmir in September 1925. He had been educated on western lines in the Chiefs College at Ajmer. Before coming to power he

had widely travelled on the Continent and lived in England and France for a long period. Liberal in views, at any rate in his young age, the Maharaja was fired with the spirit of advancement which he had witnessed in the European society. It was his desire to drastically change the face of the backward but beautiful land over which he was called upon to rule. Women's uplift was one of his objectives.

The first reform which Hari Singh introduced for the welfare of the women was the creation of a separate department in the administration for their education. Till then girls schools were an adjunct of the Education Department primarily meant for boys. But now the department was bifurcated and girls education was kept under the control of a chief inspectress; a highly educated and trained English lady, Miss E. Chawner, was appointed to the post. A number of new girls schools were opened not only in the city but also in the muffasil at all important towns and big villages ; the status of several primary schools was raised to the middle standard and the first high school was established in Srinagar which prepared students for matriculation examination of the Punjab University. Happily the high school as well as many of the other government schools were mixed in which girls of all classes and communities were admitted without any distinction.

The problem of finding sufficiently educated and adequately trained teachresses especially for higher classes was still there. The Government, for obvious reasons, declined to take the risk of employing male teachers in schools, though wisely no objection was raised to their employment in Trust schools. Therefore, educated ladies with proper qualifications were imported from the Punjab, U.P. and even far-off Bengal to recruit the staff.

Nor was this all. The Maharaja's Government granted liberal grants-in-aid to private institutions where education was imparted to girls. Rules were framed by the educational authorities in which it was specifically provided that the grant allowed for a girl in the private schools should be double to that granted for a boy in such schools. In other ways too private schools were assisted and generously treated. There can be no doubt that the Women's Welfare Trust profited by this enlightened policy of the Maharaja and it must be recognised that but for this timely financial succour the Trust movement could not have been a success.

Maharaja Hari Singh did not rest with the extension of the sphere of women's education under government auspices. He thought of launching a multi-pronged attack on illiteracy, poverty, disease and backwardness among women. He had a favourite Englishman, G.E.C. Wakefield, with him who served as his Private Secretary before 1925 and was promoted to a ministership when the Dogra prince became the ruler. This man shared the Maharaja's views and eagerness about the upliftment of women. The liberal ruler and the far-sighted minister evolved plans to enlist the support ot non-official agencies and public-spirited individuals for the furtherance of the movement. Early in 1929, an organisation called the Women's Welfare Association was sponsored for the achievement of a four-fold objective. The first and foremost aim of the movement was to dispel illiteracy and to spread education among the women by opening schools, conducting public meetings, exhibiting pictures and holding cinema shows ; the second object was to build a park and a gymnasium for recreation of women and their children ; to liquidate poverty or at least alleviate the condition of destitute widows and forlorn women by teaching them handicrafts and other arts, was the third aim ; and the last but by no means the least object of the movement was to look after the health of women a large majority of whom was emaciated, haggard, sickly and pale.

After prolonged consultations with his councillors the Maharaja carefully selected Kashmiri officials and some capable non-Kashmiris living in the State as the members of the Women's Welfare Association. He persuaded his junior queen, Maharani Taravati, to be its patron and Wakefield was chosen by him to be its President. The work of the organisation was divided into four sections and each of them was run by a sub-committee nominated for the purpose. To finance the scheme funds were collected from munificent donors, the Maharaja himself contributing generously. Substantial grants were made from the public coffers by order of the ruler.

Through the splendid efforts of Women's Welfare Trust education had been taking big strides; several girls schools were flourishing in the city and plans to extend their activities were under consideration of the trustees when the new organisation came into being. Prof. Toshakhani pleaded with Wakefield and other distinguished members of the movement that instead

of duplicating endeavours, the Association might best utilise its energies in supporting the Trust schools so far as its first aim was concerned. This suggestion was readily accepted and funds ear-marked by Women's Welfare Association for educational purposes were regularly remitted to the Trust to effect improvement in its existing schools and to widen, as far as possible, the sphere of its activities. The Recreation Sub-Committee constructed a purdah garden in Srinagar where women assembled, relaxed and held meetings, picnics and festivals and where young girls and children played games. The Health Sub Committee opened centres in different wards of the city where trained health visitors examined sick and pregnant women and girls and gave advice to the needy. In a similar manner the Handicrafts Sub Committee established their own centres at four places in different parts of the city where destitute, indigent women were taught spinning, weaving, tailoring, embroidery and other handicrafts. Raw material such as wool, yarn and cloth, was supplied to poorer women who turned it into articles of use which the sub committee arranged to sell. The women were paid wages for their work which augmented their income by a few annas daily.

Maharaja Hari Singh gave proof of his reformist zeal in other ways too. In India, a strong movement for emancipation of women had been launched long ago through the tireless efforts of men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. It had produced some good results; the evil practice of sati was banned and widow remarriage legalised. In 1891, Manmohan Ghose made tremendous efforts in the Bengal Legislature to raise the age of consent of the parties to a marriage above ten in which he succeeded. Then a countrywide agitation was started to stop child marriage through legislation with the support of public opinion. The struggle continued for decades and ultimately fructified in 1929 with the adoption of Child Marriage Restraint Act popularly known as the Sharda Act in honour of the social reformer, Harbilaṣ Sharda, who introduced and piloted the Bill through the Central Legislature. By its provisions, the age of consent within marriage was fixed at 18 for boys and 14 for girls, and outside marriage 15 for girls. Amendments to this Act in later days finally raised the age of marriage for girls to 15 and the age of consent outside marriage to 18. No sooner was

the law put on the Indian Statute Book than did the Maharaja take measures to enact a similar legislation in Kashmir which changed the outlook of the people and immensely helped the local reformers in their work for the emancipation of women.

Under the direction of the Maharaja, G. E. C. Wakefield got a cinematograph film produced depicting the unhygienic conditions under which women delivered children and the harsh treatment which was meted out to them in the homes of their husbands. The scenario for the film was written by Ram Chandra Kak, Political Secretary, (afterwards Prime Minister). It was an effective medium of propaganda for social reform; but Pandits reacted unfavourably to the move and opposed the public exhibition of the film. When an attempt was made to give a show of it in Srinagar, some young men resorted to picketting. The Englishman was blamed for interference in the domestic affairs of the community. Base political motives were ascribed to him. Ram Chandra Kak too came in for severe criticism. Telegrams were despatched to the Maharaja imploring him to intervene. Finally, Wakefield yielded to the pressure and the film was withdrawn and never shown anywhere again.

The activities of the Women's Welfare Association in the valley were confined to Srinagar. It was proposed to extend them to regions outside the limits of the city. There is reason to believe that the Association would have done good work in course of time, but only two years after its birth there were, in 1931, political disturbances on an extensive scale which resulted in far-reaching changes; Wakefield had to leave the State, the Maharaja was struck by terror which unhappily turned him into a reactionary and many old institutions and personalities were, more or less, discredited. In the altered circumstances, the Women's Welfare Association could hardly function; it dissolved in the fire of uprisings and nobody shed any tears over its disappearance.

The slogan of social reform was raised by certain Kashmiri Pandit leaders in the early years of the current century but their vision was not very broad. They were mostly worried over the wasteful expenditure on celebrations like sacred thread ceremony and other festivals which they desired to curb by organising public opinion against it. It was a fitful movement and met varied fortune for three decades. Then, in summer 1930, a

band of earnest and devoted young men imbued with crusader's zeal came forward to fight all pernicious doctrines and evil customs which were undermining the vitality, health and morals of the Pandit community. The group was known as the Fraternity for the close intimacy of the members with each other. Among the notable men who were directly or indirectly associated with the Fraternity were Damodhar Bhatt, Dina Nath Hanjura (now Head Master of a high school), Mohan Kishen Tikku (now Sub Judge), Dina Nath Bazaz, P. N. Hali, Janki Nath Vishin, Dwarika Nath Kachru (afterwards Private Secretary to Pandit Nehru), T. N. Koul Jalali, (now Secretary in the External Affairs Ministry, Government of India), Dina Nath Parimoo (now District Inspector of Schools), Dina Nath Dilgir and Dr. Saligram Koul (now Lt. Col. in the Indian Army). I was the senior member of the group.

The conception of social reform visualised by the Fraternity was comparatively broad and included not only check on wasteful expenditure and the like but also spread of education among women, freedom for widows to remarry, revival of cultural activities, improvement in community's health, encouragement to interdining, rural reconstruction and change in national dress to make it decent, graceful, dignified and suitable for local climatic conditions.

In summer 1930, the Fraternity launched a campaign to mobilize public opinion for the furtherance of the proposed social reform. Public meetings were held in different parts of the city to explain the need and the aims of the movement. Such gatherings were confined to Pandits and were mostly held at places predominantly inhabitated by the members of the community. But, for the first time after several centuries, women participated in public assemblies which were avowedly convened for non-religious and mundane purpose. In the beginning curtains were drawn to separate men from women but as enthusiasm grew and the movement gathered momentum, this restriction was deemed unnecessary and, indeed, at one place, the women, to the surprise of the conductors, removed the screen and sat side by side with men to listen to the speakers. It was a novel thing to hear songs on social reform in Kashmiri language composed by Dilgir and sung in chorus by the younger members of the Fraternity. The campaign brought the evils which were eating into the vitals of the Pandit

community to the full gaze of the thinking sections ; fingers were placed at many sore points in the social body ; the trials and trepidations of women were boldly underlined.

Thanks to the impact of western ideas and the legislation enacted by the British Government, the savage practice of burning widows had been abolished but the custom of enforced widowhood still persisted among the Pandits. Its evil effects were worsened by the bad custom of early marriage. The status of a family was measured by age of a girl at the time of nuptials ; the younger the girl the more respectable the family. Many of the girls lost their husbands in childhood. There were cases when girls of tender age, mere tiny toddlers, became widows. What mental agony and physical privations a maiden endured when, on reaching the age of puberty, she learned that she was married long ago and her husband was already dead ! And the wretched widow could claim no friends to champion her cause.

The painful fact that widows formed twenty-two percent of the female population of the Pandit community was revealed at the time of 1921 census. Another disconcerting revelation was that the proportion of females to males was 821 to 1000. Men were not debarred from marrying again at the death of their wives and polygamy had not been banned. Naturally this state of affairs condemned a considerable number of young men to life celebacy. It was a case of both enforced widowhood on the one side and involuntary bachelorship on the other. Apart from the hardships which it entailed on the flower of the contemporary generation, it was obvious the community was rapidly declining in numbers and if the process was allowed to continue unchecked, its day of destruction was not far off.

In India, with the adoption of the Prevention of Sati Act in 1829, the way to the removal of other social anachronisms which had caused tremendous distress to Hindu women was laid open. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar supported by other enlightened reformers, was successful in getting the Widow Remarriage Act enacted in 1856 ; it legalised marriage of widows and declared issue of such marriages legitimate.

Public opinion in Kashmir in early twenties was, however, vehemently hostile to widow remarriage and few dared to suggest the reform to the Pandits. What was worse, the law of the land sided with the oppresser. If an unfortunate girl, encircled

by miseries and faced by privations, displayed courage to remarry, the law declined to recognise her marriage as legitimate.

At the death of his young son-in-law, Hargopal Koul wanted to remarry Padmavati and give a bold lead to his community but few accredited leaders displayed the courage to support him publicly. Fretting and fuming poor Koul consulted discretion in abondoning the proposal. Twenty years later, in 1924, a few kind-hearted and liberal Pandits braved the public fury and openly supported the cause. Pandit Chandra Joo, an advocate of the High Court, was the leader of the group. He was a practical man who disliked to glibly discourse on the topic but felt jubilant on every occasion that the ordeal of a widow was ended by her marriage with a deserving man. He spent large sums from his well-earned money on such celebrations and risked his popularity and personal safety in the humanitarian work. Another pioneer of the movement was Swami Hari Har Koul a man of broad religious views. Himslf a bachelor, he spoke and wrote fearlessly in support of the reform and persuaded widows to defy the community by marrying their paramours if they had any.

No invectives were spared to abuse Chandra Joo and Harihar; no insult considered bad enough to hurl at them; they were jeered at, ridiculed and pelted. Lies were sedulously spread to besmear their good name. But they were made of a sterner stuff. For years both of them unceasingly carried on a verbal campaign to break the citedal of orthodoxy. It however appeared impregnable and would not betray any signs of impending destruction. A day, nevertheless, came in the year 1928 when the perseverence and sincerity of the two humanists bore fruit and a virgin widow agreed to marry a man of her own choice. It was a red-letter day, an occasion for merriment and rejoicing for the reformers but a day of mourning for no-changers. Orthodox Pandits were not unaware of the fact that many widows contracted illicit intimacies with those whom they loved or with others who helped them financially or otherwise; such clandestine unions were connived at, but celebration of weddings to legitimise them was more than Prejudice could endure. Necessity is no respecter of hoary customs or even sacred traditions. Despite opposition, the widow was married at the beat of trumpet and one courageous purohit, Gobind Bhatt Shastri, of Rainawari performed the religious rites. The cause

triumphed. The event set the Pandit community athinking ; a period of introspection ensued. After an interval of some months another widow volunteered to defy the pernicious social custom and enter into wedlock. Then another followed in her footsteps and yet another....

In 1929 and 1930, more than half a dozen marriages of young widows were celebrated to the consternation of social reactionaries. I was present at most of these celebrations and felt overjoyed to see the ramparts of orthodoxy breaking down. I particularly remember the simple yet elaborate ceremonies which were held in connection with the marriage of one Sansar Chand Peshin, a compounder of the C. M. S. Mission Hospital, with a plump, blooming young widow from the countryside. It was a milestone in the progress of the movement as both the groom and the bride came from comparatively respectable middle class families. Previous marriages had been solemnised privately and were attended by only sympathetic close friends of the parties and a few supporters of the movement. But Peshin, prompted by missionary zeal, insisted on giving widest publicity to the event. So the *barat* (marriage procession) was taken out from Peshin's house and after parading through the main streets halted at the girl's residence where nuptials were performed in an orthodox manner. This audacious move flabbergasted the oppositionists ; for the time being they were dumbfounded.

Initial battles won, the prominent leaders of the movement prepared, in autumn 1930, a memorial to the Maharaja praying that the marriage of Hindu widows be legalised in the State on the same lines as had been done, more than seventy years earlier, in India by the British authorities. The memorialists demanded that children born of such marriages should be entitled to inherit ancestral property and should suffer from no legal disabilities to which they would not have been ordinarily subjected as legitimate progeny.

Afraid of the reactionaries, Maharaja Hari Singh, more timidly than cautiously, commanded that copies of the memorial be sent to the district authorities in all parts of the State for eliciting public opinion. It is not known what happened in other districts but, in Srinagar, the Tehsildar, Raghu Nath Matoo, convened a meeting of Hindus claiming to represent various sections, to ascertain their views. I was one of the

invitees. A few days before the meeting was held, I broached the subject in one of our regular discourses at the Fraternity. The body of young enthusiasts unanimously decided to utilise the representatives' meeting as an effective forum where candid views of the youth in support of widow re-marriage should be emphatically expressed and the necessity for legalising it vigorously stressed. The tehsildar was immediately approached to permit all public workers interested in the cause of widows to attend the meeting. Ragho Nath Matoo promptly acceded to the request.

The weather was fine on that day in April 1931 when the representatives assembled on the velvety lawns of the tehsil compound ; the sun was shining brightly in the afternoon and a pleasant cold breeze was blowing. More than one hundred Pandits, old and young but all males, were present to benefit the tehsildar by their opinions on a topic of vital importance. With the exception of a dozen members of the Fraternity who were organised and prepared to make their presence felt and their viewpoint asserted, the gathering was composed of elders whose claim to represent public opinion rested on obscure but conventional greatness. Chandra Joo was present, so was S.K. Toshakhani, two staunch anvocates of widow remarriage. There were also half-hearted social reformers like Jia Lal Kilam who lack the nerve to face unpopularity. The standard-bearer of Hindu orthodoxy and social reaction, Pandit Amar Nath Kak, President of the Santan Dharam Sabha, was conspicuously seated near the tehsildar who presided over the delebrations. All the enemies of social advance whose number was sufficiently large looked towards Kak as the saviour and defender of the faith. On the whole, it was a fairly representative gathering of the spokesmen of diverse views held by Pandit community on the question of reforms.

Standing mutely in the audience but evidently evincing deep interest in the whole affair was a young Muslim student, Ghulam Nabi Gilkar, then quite unknown but, only a few weeks later, to come into prominence as a patriot, politician and fighter for Kashmir's freedom.

Ragho Nath Matoo had hardly delivered his inaugural address stating the cause and purpose of the meeting when the members of the Fraternity distributed among the audience a printed brochure, containing facts about widows in the Pandit

community—their large number, social and economic condition, their trials and tribulations as well as incidence of abortion, involuntary prostitution, (resulting from enforced widowhood) and its effect on the numerical growth of Pandits. It created a stir and since such demonstrations had not outgrown their usefulness then, many among the audience applauded the public spirit and the method of effective expression utilised by the Fraternity. Those opposed to widow remarriage were momentarily stunned. The arguments advocating the cause of unfortunate widows were reinforced by the speeches of the proponents of the reform who, heartened by the favourable atmosphere generated by the circulation of the printed material. waxed eloquent in their emotional appeals to the elderly gentlemen. For a spell it appeared that the youngsters had carried the day and the tehsildar would make an announcement accordingly.

But Amar Nath Kak was not a man to own defeat so easily. Up rose the doyen of obscurantists, the arch-enemy of social progress, the defender of custom and tradition. In the characteristic, paternal and self-righteous manner, Kak warned the tahsildar that those present were totally ineligible to be representatives and incompetent to pass verdict on age-old and sacred institution of widowhood. He thundered that a "rabble", however big in number, was not entitled to make a decision for the whole community especially on this important issue. That authority belonged to only those few who had closely studied the *Shastras* and other religious texts. He vehemently stressed that any decision not in consonance with the established practice, if adopted in the meeting, would be stoutly opposed and upset.

Kak was counter-challenged by the ebullient Fraternity members who declined to allow the so-called *shastris* and *purohits* to retard social progress in the name of religion and *dharma*. But the furious warnings of the elderly President of Sanatan Dharma Sabha had their effect and the tehsildar agreed to postpone making a report to His Highness till the verdict of Sanatan Dharam Sabha was known. Kak promised to convene a public meeting of the Sabha within a fortnight.

That public meeting will remain a memorable event in the annals of S. D. Sabha. Profiting by the experience, Amar Nath Kak despatched importunate invitations to all the anti-progressive pandits and *purohits* in the city to attend the meeting

and advised them in advance that, by quoting chapter and verse on the fateful occasion, they should render it impossible for the rising iconoclasts to introduce the proposed change in the Hindu Law. The Fraternity too redoubled its efforts to make the second demonstration a greater success. To the printed pamphlets were added pictorial placards and posters lending colour and zest to the display. But before the youthful crusaders could put in their appearance, Rugh Nath Mandir Hall on the bank of the Vitasta where the meeting was held, was packed with the forces of Kak. *Purohits* dressed in tawny-brown, almond or chocolate coloured *pherans*, their heads decked with round white turbans and big volumes under their armpits, were seated in the centre and hundred others had occupied vantage-points in and outside the hall. It was a huge gathering and the supporters of the cause were certainly in a minority. Nevertheless, the small band of the Fraternity was conspicuous by the white *khadi* dresses they wore and the huge picturesque placards which many of them held aloft in their hands. The slogans, the drawings and the figures painted on the placards were telling and provocative. The moment the fighters for the widows' cause entered the hall there was a commotion in the audience from one end to the other; there were whisperings and signs of uncontrolled irritation could be noticed on the faces of the excitable multitude.

The proceedings started with an address by Pandit Amar Nath Kak. Few have accused him of immoderation, frivolity or rashness. He is an advocate of long standing whose skill in arguing is recognised by the experienced members of the Kashmir Bar. Judges of the High Court have paid handsome tributes to his ability on various occasions. He has the gift of the gab. Calm, unprovocable and balanced, he knew how to carry a point in public debate. In the beginning of his address he was quite sober and sensible in making observations on the topic which was to be discussed; but no sooner searching questions were put to him and interruptions made by some hecklers from the Fraternity, than Kak flared up and in a demogogic fashion appealed to the baser passions of the gathered crowd. He was conscious of his numerical strength. There were shouts and counter-shouts from all sides, and a part of the audience stood up in excitement after which pandemonium prevailed in the hall. The placards, pamphlets and posters

of the Fraternity were torn to pieces and the young band was threatened by a handful of ruffians to leave the hall or be prepared for physical violence. Considering discretion better part of valour, the progressives departed but not before they had made their intention and purpose clear before the audience. Cries of *Sanatam Dharam ki jai* were raised by the adherents of Kak which meant that Sanatam Dharama disallowed widow remarriage and it would triumph. To this the Fraternity group calmly rejoined by raising the slogan, *Satya Sanatan Dharam ki jai*, conveying that the true and eternal moral code could not enslave widows and such law alone would finally emerge victorious.

With the withdrawal of the organised group of young reformers, Amar Nath Kak could do as he liked. He expatiated on the disastrous moral consequences which were bound to follow the introduction of widow remarriage in the Hindu community. He painted gloomy pictures of the societies where widows were allowed to remarry; he frightened his orthodox followers by making a prophecy that if widow remarriage was permitted the demand for a law allowing divorce was sure to be voiced next. Astutely Kak got hold of an elderly widow who was ushered into the hall weaping and remonstrating that womenfolk felt scandalised and dishonoured by immoral suggestions of false friends who advocated widow remarriage.

Elated at his performance, Kak got a resolution adopted in the gathering denouncing the memorial submitted to the Maharaja and praying that no change be effected in the Hindu code governing matrimonial relations and that widow remarriage should continue to be forbidden.

The happenings at the Rugh Nath Mandir Hall gave a setback, albeit temporary, to the movement for widow remarriage. The orthobox sections were successful in rousing the public antipathy against the social reformers in general and the Fraternity in particular. For weeks, it became difficult for the young enthusiasts to move freely in the city. They were nicknamed as *munda kath* (progeny of widows) and were contemptuously addressed and sneeringly looked down upon. Although all the members of the W.W. Trust were favourably inclined to the reform, yet I have an impression that some of them did not approve of my active participation in the demonstrations because it affected the smooth working of the Hindu girls schools.

Annoyed with my staunch advocacy of widow remarriage some Hindu parents wrote angry letters to the secretary of the Trust and withdrew girls from the schools in protest. But, happily, this proved a temporary phase as, soon after, Kashmir witnessed an unprecedented upsurge which taught several lessons to the Pandit community, one among them being the urgency to allow widows to remarry if the Hindu minority was to survive in a struggling world.

For various reasons the movement for social reform was confined to the Pandits. They had made rapid advance in education, achieved a bit of political power by capturing subordinate jobs in the administration and were beginning to extricate themselves from the effects of long and deep slumber. The Muslims, on the other hand, were still backward and almost uninfluenced by the impact of modernism, at any rate so far as their womenfolk were concerned. They had made very little progress in higher education and could not therefore grasp the importance of emancipation of women for the healthy growth of society. The educationists and the social reformers mostly belonged to Hindu fold and though some of them were liberal enough to extend their sphere of activites to Muslims as far as they could discreetly do so, yet they could not, on the whole, exercise any appreciable influence over Muslim women. However, the Muslims did not remain entirely unaffected by the changes and developments which were taking place in the sister community.

In an earlier chapter, I have stated that spread of Islam in the vally proved a blessing for the Kashmiri women in as much as they were freed from certain shackles which bound them down. It was under the influence of the liberating social philosophy of Islam that the women were saved for the first time in history from being burned on the funeral pyre of their dead husbands, that they were given freedom to remarry after becoming widows, that they enjoyed the right of divorce. Unlike the Hindu law, marriage according to Shariat is a contract made between two persons of opposite sexes. The free consent of both parties is essential. It is true that a Muslim man may legally have four wives at one time, but even here, as far as we know, the jurists have differed widely in their interpretation of the sacred text ; the prophet himself laid down the injunction that the wives must be treated equally.

Under Islam women enjoy rights of inheritance to property as full and absolute as those of men. As a general rule, the share of inheritance of a female is half the share of a male of the same degree. Besides, every Muslim wife can claim dower against her husband if need for so doing arises. Mother, wife and daughter qualify for a share in the property under all circumstances.

Thus it will be seen that the social status of women after they embraced Islam, particularly in the early days of the Muslim rule, was better in these respects and by no means pitiable. But when wicked men came to power and, later on, when the land was overrun by foreign armies of the Mughals, the Pathans and the Sikhs, women suffered along with all other people. Men took advantage of the chaotic political conditions to enslave women. The Islamic philosophy which had been a powerful vehicle of freedom was turned into a strong weapon of enslavement. Purdah and polygamy, obsequiousness and superstition, vulgarity and untidiness became virtues commendable in the eyes of religion. And gradually the Muslim women sank to a position of servitude in society despite the broad claims of the Muslim divines that the Faith conferred invaluable blessings on its female votaries.

Prior to 1931, the reins of the Muslim society in Kashmir were in the hands of mullahs two of whom, Mir Waiz Jama Masjid and Mir Waiz Hamadani, wielded huge social and religious influence. Whatever their mutual differences, in one thing they were tacitly agreed : the minds of the Muslims, particularly the women, were to be saved from pollution caused by the impact of modern education and western ideas. Study of science was forbidden in schools run by them. The mir waizes were confirmed enemies of progress and their sole anxiety was to see that the Muslims remained steadfast in their old beliefs and never imbibed any inquisitive spirit or critical tendencies. To keep women in bondage and ignorance was one of the main tenets of their creed. They upheld purdah and polygamy, opposed girls education and discouraged any change for the better in the demeaning social status of women. Liberation of women was a revolting ideal to the mullahs and the mir waizes.

In the early years of the present century, there sprang up a small sect of Ahmadiyas among the Muslims in the Punjab who sponsored freedom of women though hedged in by certain heavy

restrictions. A few Kashmiris were converted to the Ahmadiya faith and, with the zeal of new converts, these men courageously preached the progressive doctrine in teeth of stiff opposition from the mullahs and the waizes in the valley. Among the Muslims, girls and grown-up ladies of the Ahmadiya families were the first to benefit from the blessings of education and some broad views. The Ahmadiyas were no doubt few and far between but they dashed on boldly, forging ahead. In the twenties, they were fortunate in having an unostentatious, indefatigable and mirthful man, Molvi Abdullah, as their leader. Very simple in habits, unrelenting in struggle yet ever open to conviction and bold in expression of non-conformist views, he loved to think of freedom and the day when the enslaved Kashmiris would attain emancipation. It was quite natural that Molvi Abdullah should deprecate purdah, lay stress on girls education and denounce the evil customs which hampered the growth of women. Although at his home girls were educated and brought up in every respect equally with boys, he could not pay much attention to the problem of women in general for many years. He was however able to inspire and enthuse a number of Muslim young men to espouse the cause and apply themselves to make it a success.[2] Among these were Ghulam Nabi Gilkar (mentioned earlier) and Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah who has been the most outstanding personality in Kashmir politics during the last quarter of a century.

The appeals of the young Muslims for reform were mere cries in wilderness, the iron grip of mullahs and waizes being tenacious. Yet imperceptibly changes were taking place in dress and in old habits. Muslim women of well-to-do classes had begun to discard *pheran* and wear *shilwar* with a tight tunic resembling *kurta*; more and more girls were attending schools; cleanliness was rewarded and greater attention paid to personal comeliness; a new life was visible in the decaying bones of the womenfolk.

Such was the perspective of the struggle for freedom of women on the eve of the political upheaval in July 1931.

2. Molvi Abdullah embraced the Baha'i faith during the closing years of his life and fought bravely for the freedom of opinion till the end. He suffered for this at the hands of both his political opponents and social reactionaries. But his spirit remained undaunted. He died in 1948 at the age of 78.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

EMERGENCE FROM DARKNESS

THE fermentation of the twenties which the short-sighted Dogra rulers unsuccessfully attempted to meet with a policy of suppression, culminated in the gigantic upsurge of 1931. Nobody—not even those who evinced genuine sympathies with the down-trodden Kashmiris—believed that this small, docile nation of barely two million souls whose spirit had been crushed by tyranny and oppression for centuries, was capable of defying Authority by united, hostile demonstrations or of making huge sacrifices to achieve an objective as were witnessed throughout the fateful year. The whole land from one end to the other was in the throes of a rebellion. It was an elemental, mass movement in which women participated vigorously side by side with men to end the autocratic rule of the alien Dogras and attain political, social and economic freedom.

In the contemporary history of Kashmir, 1931 stands out as a year of profound significance. Generally it is celebrated for the reason that it was during this year, for the first time, that the Kashmiri masses raised the banner of revolt against the alien Dogra rule and laid the foundations of a democratic movement for the annihilation of autocracy and despotism. That is, no doubt, true ; but the real significance of the historic event lies in the change which it effected in the mental outlook of all classes and communities in the country.

From a passive, docile, slumbering fatalist, content with the life of servitude, a Kashmiri became a sensitive and impatient fighter for his human and political rights. The educated sections particularly those among them who had come under the spell of Indian struggle for freedom, declined to move in old grooves, or

to feel satisfied with the time-honoured but worn-out and exploded theories about life and the relations which subsisted between the ruler and the ruled. Old values had lost their sanctity and the State people were labouring to forge new ones and own them. As a matter of fact, 1931 ushered in an era of philosophical revolution which was much more important and consequential than the political revolt on which too emphasis has been laid by writers and observers during the past twenty-six years. The spirit of discarding the old values was not confined to the sphere of politics ; it pervaded all departments of life. Freedom was the watchword ; it started with the freedom from the alien rule but soon extended to freedom from the native exploiting classes, such as jagirdars, landlords, capitalists, mullahs and corrupt officials. Every vestige of slavery, despotism and tyranny was to be destroyed. Such libertarian outlook on life gave rise to tremendous forces and moved even an indolent soul to find its rightful place in society. No wonder that women too came forward to bend their energies in the cause of freedom and demand what was due to them in the New Kashmir that was rising from the ashes of the old.

The consequences of the terrific impact, however, were not similar in every case. At other places,[1] I have discussed why and how the essentially nationalist movement of 1931 took a communal turn at the initial stages and in the earlier period from 1931—1938. During these seven years of hectic activity when political disturbances convulsed Kashmir, Muslim politicians dominated the scene and guided the movement (alas, not always wisely) and the vociferous Hindus, by and large, were either demoralised or opposed to all progress in any shape or form. It left no alternative for women of the two communities but to adopt attitudes and assume roles similar and akin to those adopted and assumed by their respective menfolk.

Thus it fell to the lot of Muslim women to be in the ranks of fighters against the alien rule. But their backwardness in education and disability born of purdah prevented them from achieving the fame to which their earnestness and sacrifices entitled them. Women of the Muslim gentry and upper middle class who were generally secluded did not take any part whatsoever in the struggle ; the number of educated ones was

1. Read relevent chapters in *the History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir*, *Inside Kashmir* and other books by Prem Nath Bazaz.

very small. Nevertheless, poor women of the working sections those who had ever refused to be screened or confined within four walls through the six centuries of foreign domination, were infused with the new spirit and rose equal to the occasion. In the city of Srinagar and bigger towns such as Anant Nag, Baramulla, Sopor, Handwara, Uri, Muzaffarabad, Shopian, Pampur, Bijbihara (Vijbror) and Bandapur, they participated by the hundred in anti-government demonstrations soon after the disturbances broke out in July 1931 and continued to be in the vanguard of the fighting forces all through. During the early years of the movement, I have seen processions entirely composed of women, some of them with suckling babies in their arms, passing through the streets, raising slogans, denouncing the suppressive policy of the Dogra despot, or demanding release of imprisoned leaders and establishment of a democratic set-up. I have been witness to excited scenes when furious patriotic women were surrounded by armed police and ordered to disperse. On their refusal to do so the heroic spirits were abused and molested. In 1931-33 women would appear on the streets in large numbers at a moment's notice in days of tumult and excitement. In autum 1931, the Government lost nerve and after the city had been handed over to military command, a hostile crowd of women was shamelessly pounced upon and lathi-charged on 6th September by the guardians of law and order. Some women were hurt and a few swooned. The ruthless action of the authorities was denounced not only by Kashmir patriots but also in quarters outside the State which used to be friendly towards the Maharaja and his Government. Raja Hari Kishen Koul, Prime Minister, thereupon, issued orders not to deal harshly with women demonstrators in future. Yet, another and bigger procession, a few days later, was assaulted with gushing water poured upon the processionists from fire-brigade hoses. Despite the drenched clothes and bodies shivering through cold, the women patriots stood the ground and held a meeting ventilating their grievances before final dispersal.

The public meetings held by the Muslim political workers were everywhere attended by women especially when the speaker happened to be Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah or any other leader of eminence. In the plenary sessions of the Muslim Conference (which was converted into National Conference in 1939) when they were open to public, women would be present

in multitudes to hear the speeches of prominent men. Many of them sat there from beginning to the end attentively listening and assimilating different views expressed on matters of national importance. I have carefully observed and kept notes of scores of such congregations because I always felt interested in the awakening of women. It was heartening to see vivacious young girls and blooming youthful maidens mixing with veiled elderly ladies, displaying deep interest in the fortune of the political movement as it rose and fell under the fostering wings of the premier political organisation of the State.

The Muslim leaders could not canalise the enormous pent-up energy which was released by the 1931 upheaval; particularly they failed to guide the enthusiasm of women and direct it into fruitful channels. Out of the hundreds and thousands of young and old women who laboured and suffered during the first phase of the struggle not one came into prominence and none survived the lean years when diverse causes gave a set-back to the national movement. Surely there were at least a few of the fighters who possessed qualities of leadership and, given encouragement and opportunity, should have come to the fore. But, beyond momentarily coming into limelight and gaining some notoriety, the few bold women who organised the afore-mentioned demonstrations and led thousands of their sisters on the battlefield, achieved nothing and soon sank into oblivion.

Jan Ded was one of these brave souls whom I met in September 1933 when, out of curiosity to learn my uncommon views on national affairs, she came twice to interview me. She was a middle aged lady, illiterate, robust, tall and outspoken. She talked on different subjects of comman man's interest and looked at political problems from parctical point of view rather than like a theoretician as many Muslim leaders used to do. I think she was liberal in her ideas and disliked communalism which created Hindu-Muslim differences among the Kashmiris. This was remarkable in those days when communal harmony was conspicuous by its absence and to be a lover of one's religion and community was synonymous with being hostile to other creeds and communities. I thought even then and hold the belief until this day that had Jan Ded been properly educated and brought up, she would have grown along with the national movement and proved an asset to the cause of freedom. But in a society where riches are the measure of greatness, intrinsic

merit goes unrecognised. After remaining in the public eye for some time poor Jan was sneered at and discouraged. Her poverty and illiteracy concealed her virtues and not only gossip-mongers but even many of the political workers ridiculed her uninformed views, blunt suggestions and haphazard observations which her ebullient nature often forced her to utter. The top-ranking leaders of the Muslim Conference felt enraged too at her several demands which her penury and want prompted her to make. Dismayed, Jan Ded retired from public life never to be heard of again ; and so did many other such heroines who were thrown up by the recurring upheavals of 1931-34.

The small community of Pandits reacted quite differently to the wide-spread disturbances. Having benefited by the blessings of western education for over three decades, the Pandits were the first to demand a constitution, a representative form of government and prerequisites of democracy such as freedom of press and freedom of association. As a matter of fact much of the political unrest in the twenties was generated by the critical writings of some Pandit journalists in the periodicals which evinced interest in the problems of the princely states. But when all of a sudden the Muslim masses rose like the proverbial one man against Dogra autocracy and when, unfortunately, the unprecedented demonstrations assumed a religious colouring, the Pandits were terrified. They forgot their professions of liberalism and advocacy of civil liberties and constitutional government. Indeed, the bogey of Muslim dominance in Free Kashmir pushed them to the other extreme ; they set their face against any political or economic reform and consulted their safety in preservation of the status quo ; the defence of Hindu autocracy became their main concern.

This regrettable, though not entirely unjustifiable, attitude of the Pandits towards the freedom movement deprived the intelligentsia of the community from taking any useful part in national affairs for which they were better equipped than the Muslim leaders. Many a young Pandit who would have worthily guided the country through the period of intense activity and historic developments lay inactive at homes impotently denouncing the onrushing tide of popular enthusiam. But some of the more energetic and restless ones who could not sit still when the whole atmosphere was vibrating with waves of new life came out to utilise their mental and physical vigour for the good of

the community. The most prominent of these was the group already introduced to the reader as the Fraternity. In the changed environment the zealous group rechristened itself, in July 1931, as the Sanatan Dharam Young Mens Association (or Yuvak Sabha as it is popularly known) with the specific purpose of safeguarding the interests of the Pandit community.

Immediately after its formation, the Yuvak Sabha got involved in political controversies, the leaders frequently displaying their ultra-loyal attitude towards Dogra Raj; but experience soon taught them that a tiny minority which identified its interests with those of the ruling despots would have little politics. That realisation rapidly altered the trend of thought in the community as also direction of activities of the Yuvak Sabha. Instead of frittering away their energy on the barren sands of politics the young band devoted themselves to the internal reforms of the community.

Many all-inclusive plans were drawn up to re-construct the community as an ideal society of self-supporting, healthy and civilised people. Space forbids to go into the details of these comprehensive schemes; nor is doing so within the province of the present volume. But four items of the social reform are of interest and deserve some brief comments.

The first problem successfully tackled was a change in women's raiment.

Lovers of ancient tradition and custom as also those who are afraid of change have advanced amusing arguments to prove the usefulness and desirability of *pheran*, but there can be no gainsaying the fact that it produces indolence in the wearer and incapacitates him from being active and alert; *pheran* and agility ill go together. It may not be true that Akbar introduced the garb to demoralise and subjugate the proud and unsuppressible Kashmiris in the sixteenth century. Perhaps the use of it dates back earlier to the times when the Mughal emperor annexed the valley. The fact however remains that some of the minor vices that foreigners have noticed in the national character of Kashmiris are born of this unseemly dress. Besides, the *pheran* is neither graceful nor comfortable; its utility is doubtful.

The influence of western culture and increasing contact with outsiders in different walks of life gradually wrought changes in the costume of men. A new generation of Pandits had arisen

even before 1931 who discarded *pheran*, at any rate outside their homes, but women were still in the habit of wearing the medieval apparel. The young educated Hindus made several attempts to bring the womenfolk abreast of times but failed. A queer logic employed in post-1931 days when recurring communal disturbances scared Pandits, made the persuasion of reformers effective. It was argued that to defend their person and modesty women must have more protective attire than *pheran*; it should be tighter as well as graceful, economical and elegant. Not so these arguments as the swiftly changing political structure of the time prompted women to agree and the venerable *pheran* was led to yield its place to a successor in many Pandit homes.

For some time there was a tussle between two combatants who were to fill the place of *pheran*. Some leaders pleaded for *kurta* (shirt), *shilwar* (trousers) with a *chuni* (scarf) for the head as the most suitable attire in a cold country like Kashmir. But there were others who preferred *saree*, blouse and petticoat, the attractive garments which have become popular all over India and also achieved recognition in certain fashionable circles abroad. This mode of dress is admired for its gracefulness and aesthetic taste. The contest between the two varieties continues, though, regrettably, *kurta* and *shilwar* appear to be fighting with little chance of success. Usually a girl until she is married wears *kurta* and *shilwar* but after wedding Pandit ladies prefer to be attired in *saree*. The place of grass-shoe has been taken by all variety of fashionable leather footwear.

At present Panditanis are increasingly adopting the new-look and only old women or those who live in the countryside are seen in *pheran* and *taranga*. The reform produced its repercussions in the Muslims and the younger generation of that community, especially educated and upper class girls, too no longer wear pheran; they have taken to shilwar and kurta; only the few more fashionable are dressed in saree. How lovely Kashmiri women look for the change! In certain instances prettiness beggars description.

The problem of widow remarriage could not escape the attention of the younng Pandit leaders. Widespread political and communal disturbances brought home to every member of the community the force and importance of numbers in the modern world; the sense of complacency and security in the

conservative sections was rudely shaken ; the present appeared shaky and the future dismal. The yoeman service rendered by the band of sincere workers of Yuvak Sabha had endeared them to the hearts of their perplexed co-religionists. Those who were looked down upon as Munda Kath a few months earlier, acquired the halo of saviours in September 1931. If in the changed conditions the reformers renewed advocacy of widow remarriage, the community elders saw no reason to demur. Amar Nath Kak and the few die-hard conservatives sharing his views were discredited and lost authority. There was no more any fear of opposition and the cause of widows, their right to remarry if they so chose, was freely championed.

In the altered circumstances, Maharaja Hari Singh too no longer considered it necessary to ascertain the opinion of orthodox of sections and, rather unexpectedly yet no less pleasantly, made a royal pronouncement legalising widow remarriage. The first phase of the movement thus came to a successful end.

Pandit Kashyap Bandhu, preacher, journalist and politician joined the Yuvak Sabha in summer 1931. As Tara Chand Koul, a youth of twenty, he had left Kashmir a decade earlier to seek fortune in India. In the course of extensive wanderings, he embraced Arya Samaj in Quetta, changed his name to Kashyap Bandhu and was selected by the elders of the proslytising Hindu sect for the job of a missionary. He studied Sanskrit and the holy scriptures under Vishwa Bandhu in a Samajist educational institution at Lahore. He fell in love with and married, in 1929, Vimladevi, daughter of Vishnudutta, a Kashmiri Pandit who had settled at Ferozepore. Kashyap Bandhu was editing the *Arya Gazette*, an Urdu weekly devoted to propagation of Samajist doctrines, when the political disturbances broke out in Kashmir. Despite his sincere admiration for Arya Samaj his deep attachment to homeland created yearning in his heart to return to the valley. He kept himself informed of the developments and made no secret of his desires and aspirations. So when he received a call from the Yuvak Sabha to come and participate in the struggle, he reached Srinagar in August 1931 along with his wife, joined the movement and forthwith distinguished himself as a tireless worker.

It was through the labours of Kashyap Bandhu and other workers of the Yuvak Sabha that the wearing of *saree* became

popular within months of its introduction in Pandit homes. He employed the gift of the gab and his experience as preacher to influence public opinion. Subsequently Bandhu expended part of his inexhaustible energy to coax young but helpless widows to remarry and to end their avoidable misery. His labours bore fruit and more and more marriages were solemnised in the following years in Srinagar and other parts of the valley. Widow marriage ceased to carry any stigma with it and even the Sanatan Dharam *purohits* recognised the validity of the religious rites performed to finalise the weddings. In the beginning, only poorer or fallen widows who were supportless came forward to brave the public ignominy but as time passed on and the number of widow marriages increased, better class parents gave assent to their widow-daughters to marry if they so desired. Widow marriage is not even today as common as the marriage of virgins in Pandit homes but now the position is different; those who oppose such marriages are reproached as unjust, cruel and myopic people devoid of human feelings. Even some artistocratic and orthodox families can be counted among those whose widowed daughters and daughters-in-law have remarried. Such unions are no more frowned upon. It is a great triumph for the cause of suffering women.

Another reform which the Pandit leaders attempted to introduce was curtailment of wasteful expenditure on marriage ceremonies and other festivals. Side by side, it was also suggested that the making of presents in the shape of ornaments or hard cash on the part of bride's parents should be regulated by social conventions. For some time prior to 1931 a tendency to give huge sums and present more precious ornaments than their financial condition warranted, was noticed in an increasing number of parents causing concern to the well-wishers of the community. The tendency to overspend on marriages was alarming and the poorer classes were hard hit. They were forced either to borrow from the userer or to reduce their standard of living and save pennies to meet the heavy expense on marriage ceremonies of their daughters.

Among Kashmiri Pandits there are no higher or lower classes. There are no multi-millionaires and practically no beggars; every member of the community more or less enjoys equal social status with others; so any innovation, if allowed to go unchallenged, affects all the members whether they like it or not.

Several cases of ruined families and harassed daughters were publicised creating a commotion in the community. The Yuvak Sabha, in consultation with the elite of Pandits, prepared schemes to restrain extravagant and ostentatious members from obnoxious practices and did its best to enforce them. But the more rigidly the plans were put into effect the more widespread the evil became. The endeavours of the Sabha ended in complete failure. In 1944, another organisation, the Social Sudhar Samiti, came into existence with a militant programme to achieve a similar objective. Gopi Kishen its president and several well-meaning elderly gentlemen including tireless Sham Lal Koul spent their time and energy in persuading Pandits to desist from pursuing the harmful course. Uma Razdan, an unassuming young lady, was the moving spirit of this body which laboured hard to achieve the objective. Dramas in Kashmiri were specially written and acted on the stage to caricature evil practices and educate women. Squads of youths were organised who picketted homes where wealth was lavishly squandered on marriages and other festivals. It all however came to nothing.

Things have been going from bad to worse and today the immoral system of dowry, unknown in Kashmir till 1931, is as much in vogue among Pandits as in any other Indian community. Many virtuous and comely girls are deprived of suitable matches because their parents cannot afford to pay large sums in cash or in the shape of ornaments to the guardian of the bridegroom. Shamelessly the Pandits who prized in the past, virtues of contentment, simplicity and frugality, today strike bargains in terms of cash-gifts before matrimonial alliance is settled. Good men are shocked at the fall in moral standards but so far they have failed to find a solution to the problem. Perhaps a remedy lies with individuals who, by behaving honourably and rationally, can set examples for others. If anywhere example is better than precept it is here. Unfortunately even many staunch supporters of the reform have been known in the past to honour pledges in breach than in observance. And so the situation aggravates.

To implement its social reform scheme in 1931, the Yuvak Sabha launched a vigorous campaign to educate public opinion. Advantage was taken of the excitement which had been generated by the political upheavals. The spacious grounds of Shital Nath became the headquarters of the movement from where

guns of publicity were fired and trumpets blown. Public meetings were held in every part of Srinagar which were largely attended. Efforts were made to enlist the cooperation of women in making the scheme a success. In the capacity of President of the Yuvak Sabha, I had to address numerous gatherings in the city, in towns and even in far off villages wherever Pandits live. The lively scenes of enthusiasm are still fresh in my mind. I distinctly remember a meeting which was attended by more than 3000 ladies at Alikadal when a wall had to be demolished to make a big compound adjacent to the meeting ground available to accommodate the unceasing flow of eager women. I also retain in my memory the clear impressions of a huge mile-long funeral procession of men and women which was carried out with a *pheran* and *taranga* borne on a plank in the middle, symbolising the death of the discarded attire. It ended at the crematorium on the bank of Dood Ganga. The years 1931-34 were full of zest when Pandit women took a glorious part in the regeneration of the community though in a restricted sphere. Vimla Kaul, Chandadevi, Deviki Koul, Sona Batni (nee Badri) Bazaz and several grown-up girls of the Trust schools were among those who played leading roles in organising the demonstrations.

It is not surprising that a few eager maidens enthused with the spirit of patriotism and love of the community should get opportunity of displaying qualities of leadership and earn encomiums of their co-religionists. But like their Muslim sisters, and for similar causes, their glory was short-lived.

The most important problem which attracted the attention of the new leadership was the backwardness of women in education. It is true that the Women's Welfare Trust schools had become popular and hundreds of pupils annually sought admission in them; but, by and large, the overwhelming majority of the girls was afforded no opportunity to attend school. In the new atmosphere of revolutionary thinking generated by the unprecedented upsurge, a persistent demand for more schools was voiced from almost all parts of the State. The Trust raised the Vasanta Middle School to the high standard which has been doing splendid work in preparing girls for the University. It has turned out more than 500 matriculates in the past and generally shown excellent results in examinations. At times, the percentage of successful students

has been as high as 94. Much credit for this good work must go to the Head Mistress, Gora Batni Shangloo, a trained graduate, herself a product of the school. She is assisted by a few other educated girls imbued with a spirit of sacrifice and devotion.

The Vasanta High School is now housed in a building which was constructed by the Trust at a cost of nearly Rs. 71,000. On 2nd October, 1956, Yuvraj Karan Singh performed the inaugural ceremony of the building when the elite of the city people attended to admire the excellent work of the Trust.

Denominational schools too sprang into life. The Punjabi Hindus opened Arya Putri Patshala at Wazir Bagh ; the Sanatan Dharam Sabha, the Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam and the Sikhs too started schools of their own to educate girls on lines of their respective cultural patterns. The Government was forced to ear-mark an increasing amount in its annual budgets for the advancement of female education. Every year a few new primary schools were opened in the towns and large villages or, where conditions warranted, existing primary schools were raised to the status of middle standard.

In 1931, there was only one institution where university education was imparted to students in the valley. Though there was no ban on the admission of girls in the S.P. College, only boys numbering over 500 were on its rolls. Nearly two dozen girls had matriculated but in the absence of adequate arrangements for higher studies they had given up further prosecution of studies. It was a bold idea when in spring of 1932, Vimla Koul, wife of Kashyap Bandhu, who had qualified for the university course before her marriage, applied for admission in the college. A problem was created for the educational authorities but loth to face adverse public criticism, the Government wisely provided facilities to the young lady to secure admission. It was a strange spectacle to find a solitary woman moving among hundreds of young men or sitting in the class room side by side with them. Vimla had to undergo trials but she persevered to the last. Her boldness and quiet dignity encouraged many hesitant girls to follow her and seek admission. Before 1940 more than fifty girls were on the rolls of the S.P. College and when another Degree College was started by the Government to meet the ever-increasing demand for expansion of higher education, Pandit girls were equally solicitous with boys to enrol themselves in the registers of the new institution.

It is a pity that the Muslims lagged behind and deprived their daughters of the benefits of university education by refusing to admit them in the two colleges. The philosophical revolution, forceful in other spheres, had been ineffective in changing the distrustful mentality of the purdah-ridden Muslims. They disliked co-education and were not prepared to let their young daughters mingle with grown-up boys. Many years later in 1944, I pointed out, in the columns of the *Hamdard*, the harmful consequences of such an attitude. In respose many young Muslim patriots agreed with me and in their published letters strongly advocated co-education and made appeals to Muslim parents to send their daughters to the local colleges. The earnest entreaties did not go in vain. Half a dozen Muslim girls were studying in the colleges in 1947 when Kashmir witnessed another big change which brought the National Conference to power and finally ended the Maharaja's rule in the State.

In March 1936, some nuns of the Roman Catholic church started the Presentation Convent School in Srinagar for the children of well-to-do families. The standard of studies maintained in this school is better than the one obtaining in other institutions. But the fees charged from the students and other expenses incurred by them are beyond the reach of parents of moderate means. Many deserving children could not therefore derive any benefit from the school. Nevertheless, the convent proved a blessing for the fortunate children of parents in affluent circumstances and many girls were educated here. It has nearly 400 girls on its rolls some of whom are admitted as boarders. Maharaja Hari Singh granted a big subsidy to the institution in 1942 for the erection of a palatial building. The edifice with its clock-tower is on the left bank of the Vitasta pleasing to look at.

In 1940 the convent was raised to the standard of a college and some fine arts were added to the list of subjects taught in it.

Under pressure of public opinion as voiced by the old fashioned people, the National Conference Government started a separate womens college in August 1950 and housed it in the palace of Maharani Katoch at Samandar Bagh. The college buildings are spacious with well laid-out gardens and orchards having ample grounds for outdoor games. It prepares the students for both the Arts and Science degrees. The subjects taught are : English, Economics, History, Political Science, Music,

Classical Languages, Hindi, Urdu, Physics, Chemistry, Zoology and Botany.

No tuition fee is charged in the Government Womens College and the students are allowed several concessions in the form of special scholarships for orphans, backward communities, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes besides aid from Mutual Benifit Fund.

The establishment of the college gave a fillip to higher education among women. Today every year scores of girls leave the portals of the college after securing degrees in arts and sciences. In 1958, at the time of writing, there are 739 students on the rolls of the college of whom 240 are in the first year, 348 in the second year, 88 in the third year and 63 in the fourth year.

When the Women's college was started eight years ago there was dearth of Kashmiri women holding higher degrees which would qualify them for teachership in it. Profitting by the experience of the W.W. Trust, the State authorities recalled some experienced, popular and trustworthy retired men professors and put them on the staff. Happily their presence in the college did not scare away obsessed purdah-ridden parents and the plan worked successfully. In subsequent years the men were gradually replaced by women, some of them products of the college, as, and when they were avilable for the teaching profession. Today almost the entire staff of the college is composed of women. Miss Mahmuda Ahmad Ali M.A. B.T. (Panj.) Dip. Ed. (Leeds) is the Principal. She is of leftist views and has been to Moscow. Most of the professors have studied in different Indian universities and obtained their M.A. or M.Sc. degrees from them.[2]

Considering the formidable and fierce opposition that it met in the earlier periods of its growth, the women's education has registered rapid and, in certain respects, phenomenal progress

2. The names of the lecturers and demonstrators as well as their degrees are as follows : (1) Mrs. Sakeena A. Hssain M.A. L.L.B., (2) Mrs. Jai Kishori Pandit M.A., (3) Miss Zia Durani M.A., (4) Mrs. R. Shingloo M.A., (5) Miss Krishna Mohan M.A., (6) Mrs. Deviki Dhar M.A., (7) Miss Shakuntala Raina M.A., (8) Miss S. Bhan M.A., B.T., (9) Miss Shamla Mufti M.A., (10) Miss Shanta Sharma M.A., (11) Miss Sofia Hasan B.Sc. B.T. M. Ed., (12) Miss Bilqis Fatima M.A., (13) Miss Savitri Rampal M.A. B.T., (14) Miss T. Shahmiri M.A., (15) Mrs. Naqishbandi Dip. in Domestic Science, (16) Miss Sarla Wanchoo, Dip. in D.S., (17) Miss Rita Gupta M.A. (Music) (18) Miss Sultana Salah-ud-din M.Sc., (19) Miss C. Gurkhu M.Sc., ((20) Miss Santosh Vaishnavi M.Sc., (21) Miss Sheela Kaul M. Sc., (22) Shanta Mala M.Sc., (23) Mohini Muttu M.A,

in recent times. The women have equally successfully studied the arts and sciences. One Shanta Kadalbuji obtained her degree in Law from the Aligarh University though she is not a practising lawyer. Today hundreds of qualified women are serving in the education department as professors and teachers in all the grades of the profession. Indeed, while barely twenty years ago the authorities coaxed literate and semi-educated girls to accept jobs and readily granted various facilities and amenities to them, now a well-qualified woman finds it difficult to secure an appointment of her choice.

At present there are, in the Kashmir Province, 714 primary schools with 5847 girls, 25 middle schools with 2065 girls and 15 high (3 lower high) schools with 3918 girls on the rolls directly run and managed by the government. The teaching staff of the schools is entirely composed of women. In all, there are 1194 women employed as teachers in both the state and private schools.[3]

The supervising staff of the Women's Education Department too is mainly composed of highly educated Kashmiri ladies. Vimla Koul was the first Kashmiri woman who went to the U. K. to secure the degree of M. Ed. She was even before that working as a teacher in a government school. On return, she was promoted to the post of Inspectress of Girls Schools and has been functioning for many years in that capacity. Today another intelligent woman, Begum Zafarali, is efficiently controlling the whole department as the Chief Inspectress. She is assisted by two other qualified women Uma Razdan (Tarival), the devoted social worker already mentioned, and Khurshid Begum, who function as inspectresses for Srinagar Division and Baramulla Division respectively.

To teach and to alleviate suffering of ailing humanity have been the two missions more congenial to the genius of public-spirited women. No sooner did a few Kashmiri women

3. Among the head teachresses of high schools the following may be mentioned :

(1) Sofia Ashraf B.A.,B.T. (2) M. Qureshi M.A.B.T. (3) Shikutala Razdan B.A.B.T. (4) Sadiqa Mohammed B.A.,B.T., (5) Jankidevi B.A.B.T., (6) Gauri Raina B.A.B.T., (7) Maryam Begum B.A.B.T., (8) Habla Begum B.A.B.T., (9) Indradevi B.A.B.T., (10) Zubeda Begum B.A.B.T., (11) Mrs. P.N. Thusoo, B.A.B.T., (12) Kamla Bakshi B.A.B.T (13) Kanta Jalali B.A.B.T., (14) Prabha Koul B.A.B.T., (15) Lakshmi Channa B.A.B.T., (16) Kamla Wazir B,A,B,T., (17) Mrs. Ghulam Batul.

acquire requisite knowledge of science than they were attracted by the professions of nursing and medicine. Though there were no local lady doctors in Kashmir till 1940, the Dogra Government did little to encourage educated girls to study medicine. But the strong desire to go ahead removed all impediments, financial and otherwise, on the path of the struggling Kashmiris. The first batch of two girls, Krishna Dhar and Prabha Labroo, who qualified as doctors in two different universities in India returned in 1946 to be welcomed by their countrymen. Thereafter came batch after batch in succession almost every year of trained lady doctors, who joined the Medical Service and are rendering invaluable assistance to sick and invalid women and children. Most of them are employed in the State Medical Department and are creditably serving in the Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital in Srinagar (with which Diamond Jubilee Zenana Hospital was amalgamated in 1945) or in the district hospitals and dispensaries.[4]

Dr. Onkar Nath Thhssoo has founded a hospital in a commodius building on the bank of Tsunti Kuhl near Barbar Shah in memory of his wife, Rattan Rani, who, along with her three children, met a tragic death in 1941 in a fire accident. The hospital was still passing through initial stages of its growth when Dr. Thussoo married a second wife, the hard-working and kind-hearted Dr. Jagat Mohini. The husband could not have made a better choice ; the bride fulfilled the most optimistic of his hopes in giving him a helping hand. By their untiring service the couple has made the hospital popular particularly among the poorer classes in Srinagar ; but its fame mainly rests on the skill and energy that Dr. Jagat Mohini brings to play in restoring health to innumerable ailing women and children who seek her advice and medical assistance.

Even before Kashmiri girls had sought admission in outside medical colleges those who could not afford to go beyond the

4. The names of the lady doctors working in government hospitals and dispensaries are : (1) Dr. Iqbal Sawhney, Gynaecologist (S.M.H.S. Hospital). (2) Dr. Girja Dhar (S.M.H.S. Hospital), (3) Dr. Tahira Khanum (Health Visitors Training School), (4) Dr. Sajada Qureshi (H.V.T. School), (5) Dr. J. A. Nagishbandi (H.V.T. School), (6) Dr. Sheela Razdan (Sopore), (7) Dr. Prabha Labroo (Anantnag), (8) Dr. Durga Koul (Shopian) (9) Dr Durga Kaw (Srinagar), (10) Dr. Shanta Munshi (T. B. Hospital), (11) Dr. Chuni Magazine (Srinagar), (12) Dr. R. Chhibar (Srinagar), (13) Dr. Prabha Ganju (Baramulla), (13) Dr. Vimla Rambal (Akhnoor).

borders of their motherland but were desirous of devoting their lives to nursing, learnt the art in the training classes which were attached to the metropolitan hospitals in the State. Scores of agile and young girls were enlisted and taught the work of nursing. Some of them were subsequently deputed to recognised nursing institutions in India to acquire higher proficiency and knowledge. Today there are two sisters, six senior grade and twenty junior grade qualified nurses in the Hari Singh Government Hospital.[5] The number of those who work as apprentices or are learning the profession is much larger. No one looks askance at a nurse now as in bygone times. Indeed, she is admired and her work appreciated.

The political disturbances of 1947-48 drove out large crowds of Hindus and Muslims from the Kashmir State. Educated girls who formed part of this exodus have secured employment in different spheres in the two republics of India and Pakistan. They are serving as professors, doctors, stenographers, telephone operators, librarians, shop-assistants, teachers or travel agents. Some are employed in Defence Forces or in the Central Secretariat of the Government of India.[6]

Throughout recorded history Kashmiri women have found important place in domestic services and in small professions and trade. As stated earlier, they are known as efficient house-keepers ; as cooks they have achieved wide reputation. In spinning and weaving their deftness and dexterity can be witnessed by the lovely shawl which has been the rage of wealthy people in far and near countries of the world. Like their menfolk, Kashmiri women work hard as washers, cleaners, milk sellers, vegetable purveyors, wicker-basket makers and flower vendors. With ever-vigilant eye they manage shops and sell

5 The names of the sisters and the nurses are as follows :—
Sisters : (1) O. Sawhney and (2) Mrs K. M. Cachart.
Nurses (1) L.N. Mall, (2) Mrs. Malhotra, (3) G. Rath, (4) S.N. Bux, (5) R. George, (6) Mukhta, (7) M. Bali, (8) Arundati, (9) Maryam, (10) Usha Nagari, (11) Sayida Begum, (12) Mohini, (13) Sarladevi, (14) Noor Banu, (15) Mukhta, (16) R.D. Zalpuri, (17) R.D. Tiku, (18) Sultana Kalsum, (19) Zoona Begum, (20) Zaina Begum, (21) S.R.N. Bali, (22) M. Francis.

6. Dr. Shanta Wazir is a teacher of Bacteriology and Dr. Gouri Bazaz a teacher of Pathology in the Lady Hardinge Medical College at New Delhi. Kamla Oont is a Superintendent in the Central Secretariat of the Indian Government. There are others, equally notable, in different walks of life and spread all over the subcontinent whose particulars are not available at the time of writing.

many commodities such as bread, butter, cheese, fruit and fish in shops or on pavements in the bazars in Srinager and other towns. They ply boats, big and small, and make pots and other utensils which are used in the Kashmiri homes.

In the field of agriculture peasant women work side by-side with men and as strenuously, transplanting paddy stalks under the scorching rays of summer sun ; they keep watch on the long stretching corn fields, reap harvests and carry sheaves of food-grains on their head from field to store-yard.

Soon after independence an organisation known as the Social Welfare Advisory Board was formed in India which evinces keen interest in the uplift of women. It has its branches in all the States. The Chairman of the Kashmir Branch is Yuvrani Yashorajya Lakshmi, the 24-year old wife of Yuvraj Karan Singh (Maharaja Hari Singh's son), the Sadar-i-Riyasat. She is also the President of the Jammu and Kashmir Branch of the All India Women's Conference. The Yuvrani takes a lively interest in the work of the Indian Red Cross of which she is a member. Begum Zafarali is a member of the State Social Welfare Board and also Secretary of the State Women's Conference.

As a result of the widespread disturbances of 1931 and the grim struggle for independence that followed it, the Maharaja appointed the Constitutional Reforms Conference (1932) and the Franchise Committee (1933) which, after prolonged enquiries and debates, produced a constitution for the State. This was passed into law and, for the first time in history, the Kashmir people were enfranchised in 1934; a small number of women too got the vote.

With the advent of independence the principle of adult franchise was fully recognised by the constituent assemblies of India and Pakistan and, like other women of the subcontinent, all the adult Kashmiri women secured the right irrespective of any property or educational qualifications. Kashmiri women are now entitled to vote in the elections to the State Legislative Assembly as well as to the various municipalities, the town area committees and the panchayats.

For a whole decade from 1936-46 Kashmiri women took little or no part in politics but were constructively engaged in acquiring literacy and learning. When in May 1946 the National Conference under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah embarked upon "Quit Kashmir" adventure, politically-minded Muslim women came again to the fore. They actively participated in

the demonstrations against the alien Dogra rule. Though the participants still came largely from the working classes a few of them also belonged to upper and educated sections. An elusive figure was Noor Gujri, a milkman's naughty daughter, who plagued the military and the police through her vituperative utterances and pugnacious pranks. Handsome and in the prime of her youth, she possessed a glib tongue and the uncommon ability of exciting women crowds. She was repeatedly arrested, as often clamped in prison for a few days and released. Undeterred she rejoined the ranks of agitators on regaining freedom. The National Conference leaders boosted her and denounced the authorities for imprisoning her. But Noor Gujri had another trait too in her character; though illiterate she was independent in her views and was of a communal bent of mind. In post-1947 days, she became a headache to the National Conference Government due to her forthright and bitterly critical opinions which she expressed in receptive congregations. She was warned to desist and later on abused by the supporters of the new regime but when this remedy proved ineffective the Government arrested her. Once she was reported to have been manhandled by some men of the Indian Military. Harassed, persecuted and victimised, Noor Gujri finally considered her safety in retiring from politics.

Another heroine of the "Quit Kashmir" days was Fatima, a peasant woman who was shot dead by the Dogra Army at Anantnag in May 1946 while leading a procession carried out to protest against the repressive policy of the Maharaja's Government. She is the first woman, in modern times, who laughed at death in her love for the motherland. The Dogra forces had occupied the town and armed soldiers were parading through the streets with pointed bayonets fixed on their guns. To make a hostile demonstration appeared impossibile but when some bold souls decided on defiance, Fatima, at the head of a small band of brave women, expressed eagerness to participate. She would hear no advice nor did fear of death cower her. In the crowd her slogans were the loudest and for that reason she was made the special target of attack by the furious sepoys of the Maharaja.

A prominent role in the "Quit Kashmir" movement was played by Begum Abdullah and Zainab Begum both of whom belong to richer class and are educated.

Sheikh Abdullah married in April 1933 the pretty and accomplished daughter of Harry Nedou, an Englishman, part proprietor of the well-known Nedous Hotel at Srinagar and Gulmarg. In his colourful youth Harry fell in love with an attractive Muslim Gujjar lass of Tangmarg and readily embraced Islam to get her hand. It appears that after marriage the Gujjar wife tenaciously clung to orthodoxy and the rituals of Islam lest her co-religionists suspect her infidelity to the true faith. Harry Nedou's home presented a queer admixture of western culture and Islamic traditions. In such East-West atmosphere was Begum Abdullah born and brought up under the strict supervision of her affectionate and God-fearing mother. Born in 1916 the girl was educated, taught all the manners of an English home and trained to be a devoted wife and a patriotic woman. At the age of 17 she passed Senior Cambridge examination with distinction. She was however kept in purdah. For several years after her marriage with Sheikh Abdullah, she did not venture to come out in the public and fight side by side with her husband for the freedom of Kashmir. But in the forties she realised the evils of the purdah system and recognised her duties towards the motherland and its women.

After Sheikh Abdullah and his colleagues were arrested in May 1946, the begum broke the shackles that bound her to certain pernicious traditions and customs. She removed the veil, rose equal to the occasion and joined the ranks of freedom fighters. She led the anti-government demonstrations, delivered speeches to maintain the morale of the National Conference workers and thus raised the drooping spirit of Abdullah's followers. Collecting donations from charitable sympathisers, she arranged relief for the victims of Dogra aggression. She taught passionately the ideal of Hindu-Muslim concord. When Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru visited Kashmir in summer 1947 they paid glowing tributes to her patriotism, broadmindedness and devotion to duty. In the huge prayer meetings which the Mahatma held at Srinagar during his short stay in the beginning of August, Begum Abdullah was asked by him to recite the verses of Holy Quran. At the time of the partition of the subcontinent when Hindu refugees poured into the valley from the N.W. Frontier and the Punjab, she did what she could to alleviate their suffering. She toured extensively to help the poor and the hapless. Subsequently for nearly four years

1947--51, while Sheikh Abdullah was the Prime Minister, she worked as the President of the Kashmir Red Cross and relieved many a man and woman of misery and destitution by distributing aid in cash and kind.

Begum Abdullah had a few differences with her husband on certain matters concerning state politics and the National Conference organisation On occasions divergence of views gave rise to misunderstandings. The begum's interest in political affairs waned towards the end of 1951 and she had practically retired from public life when in August 1953 Sheikh Abdullah was deposed and detained. Beyond occasionally issuing statements or giving interviews to press correspondents on the current political situation, the begum has taken no active part in public life during the past five years. In the absence of Sheikh Abdullah who is still behind the bars, she is fully absorbed in looking after her home. She has five children, three sons and two daughters.

For her labour of love and sacrifice in the cause of Kashmir's freedom, Begum Abdullah earned the affectionate title of Madar-i-Meharban (Kind Mother) by which she is remembered among the followers of her husband.

Zainab Begum did not earn as much fame as did Begum Abdullah. But she too achieved importance as a leader of "Quit Kashmir" agitation. Unflinchingly she has supported the National Conference and directed her energies under its auspices to the upliftment of women. Like other workers, she had to face the rough and tumble of life when the Conference was in opposition. But when fortune smiled on the party and it came to power in 1947, Zainab's path became less arduous. Thenceforth she quietly applied herself in solving the varied problems facing women. Her attitude towards the Government has been co-operative but critical. Presiding over a Kashmiri Zenana Conference which was sponsored by the National Conference leaders, Miss Zainab observed in Srinagar on 24th November, 1951 :

> "I want to invite your attention to another important matter viz., the scarcity of essential necessities of life prices of which are rising uncontrollably. The problem of increasing prices has taken the most discouraging shape in our country. It is obvious to all that on the one hand there is no limit to which the prices of the essential commodities can be raised and on the other the incomes cannot go beyond a certain limit with the result that barring a small fortunate section the purchasing power of large

majority of people has fallen. It is our common experience that goods are available in the market but there are no customers which proves that people do not have the money to purchase them."[1]

The deposition of Sheikh Abdullah did not shake the faith of Zainab in the National Conference as it did in case of many others. She remained as staunch a supporter of the party as ever and is fully cooperating with the regime which was set up in August 1953.

The grave crisis which was caused in Kashmir politics by partition of the subcontinent divided women as it did all classes of people. On the one side stood National Conference and all those elements which wanted the State to accede to India and on the other were certain liberals and pro-Pakistan sections who demanded that the State people should have freedom to decide the future affiliations of the country through the method of a fair and impartial plebiscite. During the closing months of 1947 when North India was enveloped in widespread disturbances, bloodshed and halocausts and when Pathan tribesmen entered Kashmir, sacking towns, raping women, murdering people and looting bazars and homes, the National Conference Emergency Administration raised a volunteer corps composed of young men to assist the Indian Military in fighting the outsider. A girls' squad too was recruited with the same purpose. It was composed of 40 girls all robust and full of life and energy. They were trained in use of arms and regularly drawn out on the cantonment grounds for physical exercises. For the first time after nearly nine centuries, did the Kashmiri women get an opportunity to wield weapons with the aim of defending their homeland. But it was an emergency measure which came to an end with the cessation of hostilities and the implementation of cease-fire agreement between India and Pakistan in January 1949. Subsequently the State Government started the National Cadet Corps Organisation in which girls were recruited and trained to handle and use arms. There are at present two Senior Division and six Junior Division troops of girls in the Corps. Recently when the Cadet took part in a march-past to celebrate the 9th All-India National Cadet Corps Day, no less than 80 girls of the senior and junior divisions participated.

The five-member commission which was deputed by the U. N.

1. Presidential Address to the Kashmiri Zenana Conference, P. 11.

Security Council to report on the Kashmir dispute toured the valley in July 1948. One day they paid a visit to the S. P. College. Elaborate precautions were taken by the National Conference Government that no opponent should approach the commissioners with any memorandum or statement. But a small group of educated women calmly elbowing out policemen in uniform and detectives in mufti reached the thoroughfare leading to the college at the nick of time. Three of them Begum Birjis, Inspectress of girls schools, Begum Shaukat Ali and Begum Jehan Ara were at the head of the group. With deafening shouts the women raised slogans denouncing the Government and demanding a plebiscite when the car carrying the commissioners passed that way. The police came down upon the demonstrators and whisked them away. Thereafter they were kept in different jails including the Bahu fort for several months. They were finally sent to Pakistan after cease-fire was given effect to on first January 1949.

At the time of Sheikh Abdullah's deposition and imprisonment in August 1953, demonstrations were held all over the valley expressing anger against the new regime. Again women came out and took their due share in them. The authorities resorted to the policy of suppression and opened fire on hostile processions to disperse the infuriated crowds. Among those who died as a result at least three were women one of whom is said to have been pregnant.

The establishment of Radio transmitting stations in both parts of the Jammu & Kashmir State in the post-partition days opened new avenues of employment for women and greater opportunities for the unfoldment of their artistic talent. Besides working as announcer of news and programmes, some Kashmiri women have achieved proficiency in singing and instrumental music; they act in feature plays broadcast from the Radio stations at Srinagar, New Delhi, Rawalpindi and Karachi.[1] Amateur and professional artistes from the valley come down to participate in the national folk-dance festival which is held annually in New Delhi on the Republic Day (26th January) at the National Stadium and in the inter-university union celebrations held annually

8. Some notable Kashmiri artists employed by Srinagar Radio are : (1) Tahira Hussain, (2) Shanta Koul, (3) Taj Begum, (4) Zoona Begum, (5) Naseem Akhtar, (6) Dulari Koul, (7) Gulzar Begum, (8) Raj Begum and (9) Kummari Shukun. Mrs. Renzu is in charge of Women's Section of the Kashmir Radio.

at the Talkatora Garden. Art critics have occasionally paid tributes in the columns of leading journals to the performances given by the Kashmiri participants.

Among women who have earned reputation as writers Satyavati Malik born in Srinagar of a philanthropist father, Charanjit Lal, but now settled in New Delhi, is well known. Some of her short stories in Hindi have appeared in a volume entitled *Do Phul* (Two Flowers); a few of them have been translated into English. In another volume *Kashmir Ki Sair* (Trip to Kashmir), she has given an interesting account of her travels through the valley. Satyavati's other works are: (1) *Manav Rattan* (Jewels Among Men), (2) *Amit Rekhayen* (Indelible Lines), (3) *Vaishakh Ki Rat* (Night of Baisakh) and (4) *Din Rat* (Day-Night). For writing *Amar Path* (Immortal Way), a book giving description of various places of note, the Government of Uttar Pradesh awarded a prize of Rs. 400/- to her. She contemplates publishing another volume of her short stories and essays. Satyavati is a popular figure in the circle of Hindi literateurs. She is in charge of Hindi Bhawan at New Delhi. She is a passionate lover of the valley—its products, its people no less than its fauna and flora. Her writings mainly deal with topics on Kashmir —her extensive tours and interviews with celebrities or common people living in the earthly paradise. During leisure hours she paints or plays on some musical instrument especially sitar.

Satyavati's sister Purusharthvati died in 1930 at the very young age of 19. She was a budding poet. A collection of her 100 poems entitled *Antarvedana* was posthumously published. Another sister of Satyavati was Urmila who participated in India's struggle for freedom and courted arrest and suffered imprisonment in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1931. Unhappily Urmila too died in 1942 and a brilliant career was cut short too early. Satyavati's daughter, Kapila Vatsyayan, is an Assistant Educational Advisor to the Government of India. She is also an amateur dancer and has earned applause from several audiences.

Asha Dhar (nee Gouri Oont) has contributed several articles on women of Kashmir and other subjects to different periodicals. She is also a writer of short stories. At present she is in London preparing for M. Ed.

Soma Mirza daughter of J.L. Koul Jalali, author and columnist, contributes articles to the Hindi journal *Saraswati* of Allahabad.

With the restoration of self-confidence Kashmiri women are taking to other cultural pursuits. Kishori Koul a maiden in her twenties is a painter of merit. She started with water-colour but has successfully tried her hand at the oils which is her medium now. She is splendidly coming up in still-life, human figure as well as in landscapes.

Kishori is a great grand-daughter of a well-known artist Naran Murtsgar (Narain, the Portrait Painter) who flourished half a century ago and whose water-colour paintings decorate the walls of many homes in the valley. When a child of ten Kishori unluckily fell victim to tuberculosis and was admitted in the Tangamarg Sanitorium. Lying long weeks and months on sick-bed she thought of drawing pictures to while away time and kill the tedium of never-ending days. A kind-hearted teacher, S.N. Bhatt, came to her rescue. Astonishment descended on the parents and the doctors attending on her when she grasped the spirit of the art in a surprisingly brief duration. The teacher declared he had nothing more to teach the pupil. I sent her a copy of Irving Stone's *Lust for Life*. Its study whetted her zest; Von Gogh became her ideal; she went ahead alone and painted feverishly day after day without break to fulfil the unquenchable yearning of her thirsty soul. Every new sheet of paper or piece of canvas on which she used the brush came out more beautiful than the one she had painted before.

In 1956, Kishori hung fifteen of her water-colours in the Art Exhibition at Srinagar; some of these were admired by the connoisseurs; for one she gained a prize. In January 1956, her three paintings were put up by the International Tuberculosis Conference in their exhibition of handicrafts at New Delhi as work of a T. B. patient.

Kishori has, in the short span of five years, produced more than eight hundred water-colours and oils. She contemplates to hold one-woman exhibitions of her paintings in different cities of India in the near future. "I desire to paint all my feelings and express all my emotions : otherwise I can have no rest, no satisfaction, no happiness," she wrote to me recently in a letter full of vigour and determination. "Till the last day of my life you will find me painting; it is the vital breath which sustains me. Without it I cannot exist. It is an urge within me that is irrepressible."

Kishori is a fiction writer too and has contributed short stories to magazines of which a few were broadcast from the Kashmir Radio. This year she was employed by the Radio as an announcer but her passion for painting drove her away to Baroda where she is studying under Prof. N. S. Bendre in the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University.

Early this year (1958) Kishori's three paintings were included in the National Exhibition of Art in Jaipur House held by the Lalit Kala Academy. Quite recently she took part in painting exhibitions held by the Bombay Art Society at Bombay and the Bombay State at Poona when the judges, pleased with the work, awarded her prizes in recognition of her merit. In the one she earned Rs. 150 and in the other Rs. 1500.

Following the introduction of several non-official Bills in the Central Legislature to improve the status of Hindu women as regards the property rights and giving the daughter a right to inheritance, the Government of India appointed, in 1941, a committee under the chairmanship of Sir B.N. Rau. The commitee was inter alia to examine the women's Rights to Property Act and to remove any injustice to the daughter in the law. Through extensive inquiries, Rao Committee discovered that Hindu women suffered from serious inequities in social law and custom. Despite the Sharda Act child marriage prevailed; the evil of dowry with its attendant suffering was there; polygamy existed, while no divorce was allowed ; women could not inherit property even acquired by their husbands as they had no right to sell or alienate it; a woman could not adopt children and female children could not be legally adopted by any one.

The Rao Committee therefore suggested that the best course to do justice would be to codify the entire Hindu Law relating to marriage and succession. When the draft Hindu Code Bill was circulated for public opinion it raised a storm of protest and agitation in orthodox and conservative circles. But after many years of hard struggle by progressive sections the core of the Bill was passed into law, in 1956, by the first Parliament of the Indian Republic in the shape of four major Bills—the Special Marriage Bill, the Hindu Marriage Bill, the Hindu Succession Bill, and the Adoption of Maintenance Bill.

These laws have undoubtedly made the life of Hindu women much happier. Monogamy has been made the universal rule. Girls can no more be married to idiots or lunatics. There is

provision both for judicial separation as well as for divorce; the grounds on which the divorce can be obtained have been recognised and clearly laid down. Men convicted of bigamy can be imprisoned up to a period of seven years and fined. Hindu women can now hold their property absolutely with full rights to sell, mortgage, give away or dispose off as they desire. Previously the law decreed that a wife should be maintained by her husband as long as she lived with him; but now a woman can claim maintenance even if she is living separately after divorce; the law also makes the father-in-law responsible for the maintenance of the daughter-in-law if she is unable to maintain herself on her own earnings or property. Under certain conditions a woman can adopt a child and any child up to the age of 15 years may be adopted provided the parents agree. Although certain essential rights included in the original Hindu Code Bill were deleted to pacify the die-hard and reactionary elements, adoption of the four Acts proved a red-letter day in the history of Indian women. It indicated a revolution in the thinking of the people. Following the Indians, a healthier attitude was adopted by the Kashmiris which gave a fillip to the struggle for women's freedom.

A new spirit, no doubt, of adventure, study, research and heroism is permeating Kashmiri women which enables them to break, one after another, the numberless chains with which they were bound down for hundreds of years; they are slowly emerging from darkness and taking increasing share in shaping the future of their country and in forging the destiny of the nation. But there is no room for complacency and no occasion for resting on oars. Much work lies ahead and many impediments remain to be removed from the path if the women are to come into their own.

Despite the notable progress in education during recent years, it is disheartening to note that not a single woman has distinguished herself through public service or intellectual achievement to gain recognition by being elected to the State Legislature. No one has so far earned the distinction of becoming a member of a municipal committee, a district board or even a panchayat. There are many walks of life which are untrodden by them. Further, it must be admitted that whatever progress has been acieved by them is almost solely the fruit of the work of foreign missionary women or patriotic Kashmiri men. It is

time that the women took the lead in the emancipation struggle and solved their problems by their own endeavours.

The spirit of modernism has not touched the vast majority living in the countryside; women in thousands of villages and small towns remain illiterate, ignorant and sunk in superstition. Only a fringe of the women population living in the city and one or two big towns have benefited by the resurgence movement so far. The new spirit must travel to the farthest corners and arouse the humblest and poorest in the land. It is the peasant women who constitute the backbone of the community and who have to be awakened and led on the path of progress if the nation is to grow and prosper.

Kashmiri women continue to suffer in hundred and one ways; many are the difficulties that they have to face in their onward march. Polygamy is still practised though it is not common; there is no state legislation penalising Muslims for marrying more than one wife at a time. Worse still is the desertion of innocent wives on flimsy grounds especially when the victim does not enjoy any right of divorce as in the case of Pandit women. The home of husband is no bed of roses for newly-wedded wives; the treatment meted out by the elderly people particularly the mother-in-law is in many cases harsh and unkind; scores of budding, blooming girls meet premature death for lack of sympathy in the homes of their husbands.

Among the majority of upper class Muslims the pernicious practice of purdah still obtains. It is not an unusual sight to see a well-to-do, educated husband attired in the latest western fashion with a burqa-clad wife by his side. Many highly educated women employed in various institutions move about veiled because their reactionary co-religionists and mullahs dislike women enjoying liberty to walk on the public streets without hiding their faces. History be thanked that the curse is confined to the rich ; for, the women of toiling millions have preserved this much of freedom even through the darkest period. By some strange process of rationalisation religion-ridden community elders acquiesce in it and thus the working class women are exempt from the infliction. How much more speedily would Kashmir progress if the veil were given up and complete freedom restored ; the educated victims realise it better than can be explained.

Pandit girls are not hamstrung by imposition of purdah ; the community has wisely encouraged the women to abandon it ; in post-1931 days it was hurriedly discarded and now veiled Panditani would be only a curious spectacle reminiscent of gloomy times. But Pandit girls are weighed down by other evil customs the most dreadful of which is demand of dowry. Only quarter of a century ago giving of big amounts or costly presents on weddings even by wealthy and aristrocratic parents was rare. There was an unwritten social code called *Tyeth* which strictly restricted the weight of gold and other precious metals as also the amount of money that girl's parents could offer at the occassion of marriage and even after. It is true that there were different grades but the custom was set with an eye on the means of the poorest member of the community. No one dared go beyond the recognised social custom. The code no longer exists ; newly rich and upstarts have torn it to pieces. Today no marriage takes place until parents of the girl, irrespective of their means, are prepared to pay huge sums at betrothal and at the wedding. The consequences of the immoral practice are ruinous in the case of poor, respectable and cultured families. Apart from other effects, it forces virtuous and talented girls to accept inferior men as their husbands ; it destroys the personality of the bride and smothers her soul ; not infrequently dower is the initial cause of mutual bickerings and bitterness ; it eventually proves ruinous.

In Article 14, the Indian Constitution says : "The State shall not deny any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India." Again, Article 16 guarantees that "no citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence, or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the State." Thus all careers are open to the Kashmiri women and it is entirely up to them to derive the best advantage from the opportunities created and afforded.

Undoubtedly the days are gone when spread of literacy among women was obstructed and dissemination of knowledge opposed. Hindus are now vying with the Muslims in getting their daughters speedily educated ; both take pride in training them as teachers, doctors and nurses ; at any rate it is so with the classes where one of the parents is sufficiently educated and

culturally conscious. But women are rarely permitted to choose careers outside the professions of teaching and medicine. Kashmiri women have yet to invade the securely preserved precincts of civil administration, defence forces and various other avocations. They have to do what women are doing in advanced countries of the world and, with that objective in view, they have to challenge orthodoxy at every stage and in all walks of life. Above all, they have to create enviornment and atmosphere in which they can live fuller lives and be able to unfold their potentialities unrestrictedly. The stupendousness of the task is obvious ; it will need herculian nerve to undertake it.

It is wise to remember that forces of reaction and obscurantism are not dead. There are people who deplore the re-emergence of women from thraldom and heartily detest the little liberty which has been granted to the fair sex. Among such are even those who call themselves progressives and were educated at the universities. Such seeming friends would have put the hands of the clock back if they could. But it is impossible to stem the tide of progress once it has gained momentum. Nevertheless, the reactionaries do all that is in their power to check further growth by narrowing the limits.[9] The more vulgar elements, sitting on shops or loitering on roads, pass indecent remarks while educated, well-dressed or comely ladies pass by. Lately this menance has been on the increase and has become a source of perturbation to the relatives of young women no less than to the progressive sections. It is essential that public opinion is roused to end the mischief. In no part of Kashmir, in no city, town or village, should a woman be harassed for enjoying her liberty.

The biggest stumbling block, however, in the path of advancement are the age-old prejudices still cherished by women themselves. Unless these are dispelled the progress is bound to be slow. If a Hindu lady thinks, as she has been led to believe through centuries, that man is superior to her, no law,

9. Harbans Singh Azad, Minister of State for Education in the present Kashmir Government who is evidently quite ignorant of Kashmir history and culture, recently issued orders asking teachresses not to use cosmetics during school and college hours. When questioned by a press correspondent Azad defended his stupid action by saying that "the parents of girls have welcomed the step." He added that simple uniforms to be worn by school and college girls had been prescribed by the authorities and any "overdressing" and use of cosmetics by teachers would not produce a healthy effect on pupils. (*Statesman*, New Delhi, February 3, 1959.)

no public opinion and no outside power can make her his equal. If a Muslim lady believes that putting on veil is essential for maintenance of her modesty and honour, as unhappily the orthodox elders have been dinning into her ears during the past five centuries, no force is going to annihilate the unhealthy custom. Much therefore depends in future on women themselves to increase the tempo of progress. It is futile to decry religion, to denounce narrow-minded elders or backwardness of society. The destiny of every class, community and nation lies in its own hands. The enemy sits within men and women, in the shape of deep old prejudices. Those who leave them untouched can never attain the goal of freedom.

It is heartening to find that the various organisations which reflect public opinion in the valley have, with one accord, acknowledged the importance of the freedom of women as a pre-requisite for the regeneration of society. Be they nationalists, socialists or communists, the leaders are unanimous in expression of their views on this topic. All the popular parties have made solemn pronouncements that women in Free Kashmir will enjoy equality with men. The National Conference and the Kisan Mazdoor Conference have even published blueprints envisaging the shape of such equality in attractive terms. How far these good intentions will be translated into practice remains to be seen. Time alone will show what reliance can be placed on the pledges of politicians given during the days of struggle for freedom. But if the declarations are trustworthy it may be safely hoped that in future women will be vouchsafed the place which their talents no less than their achievements in the long course of Kashmir History entitles them to get.

THE END

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INDEX

A

Abdullah, Begum, 262, 263, 264
Act, Child Marriage Restraint, 231, 232
Act, Widow Remarriage, 234
Ahmed Ali, Miss Mahmuda, 257
Akhtar, Naseem, 266
Amrita Prabha, Queen, 118, 119
Amrita Prabha, mother of Jayapira, 120
Ananglekha, Queen, 63, 64, 65, 66
Arnimal, 17, 175, 176, 177, 178
Arundati, 260 f.n.
Ashraf, Sofia, 258 f.n.
Association, Girls, 227
Association, Womens Welfare, 230, 231, 232

B

Banu, Noor, 260 f.n.
Bazaz, Dr. Gauri, 260 f.n.
Bazaz, Sona Batni (nee Badri), 254
Bakshi, Kamla, 258 f.n.
Bali, S.R.N., 260 f.n.
Batul, Mrs. Ghulam, 258 f.n.
Begum, Birjis, 266
Begum, Culzar, 266
Begum, Habla, 258 f.n.
Begum, Khurshid, 258 f.n.
Begum, Maryam, 258 f.n.
Begum, Raj, 266
Begum, Sayida, 260 f.n.
Begum, Taj, 266
Begum, Zainab, 262, 264, 265
Begum, Zaina, 260 f.n.
Begum, Zoona, 260 f.n.
Begum, Zoona, 266
Begum, Zubeda, 258 f.n.
Besant, Mrs. Annie, 220, 222
Bhan, Miss S., 209
Bhombra Khatun, Queen, 159
Bimba, Queen, 119
Butler, Miss, 209
Bux, S.N., 260 f.n.

C

Cachart, Mrs. K.M. 260 f.n.
Channa, Lakshmi, 258 f.n.
Chandadevi, 254
Chawner, Miss A., 214
Chhiber, Dr. R., 259 f.n.
Chinta, 102
Chudda, Commander, 104, 105, 106, 107
Corps, National Cadet, 21
Cousins, Dr. Margaret, 222
Coverdale, Miss, 214

D

Ded, 44
Ded, Lal, *see* Lalla
Ded, Jan, 247, 248
Devadasis, 108, 109
Dhar, Asha (nee Gauri Oont), 247
Dhar, Mrs. Deviki, 257 f.n.
Dhar, Dr. Girja, 259 f.n.
Dhar, Krishna, 259
Dehat, 160
Didda, Queen, 11, 29, 31, 32, 36, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 66, 96, led troops, 34, her works, 37
Dipamala, 164
Durani, Miss Zia, 257 f.n.

F

Farzi, (Begum Samru) 17, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189. 190, 191, 192
Fatima, Fighter for Freedom, 262
Fatima, Miss Bilqis, 257 f.n.
Fitze, Miss, 214
Francis, M., 260 f.n.

G

Ganju, Dr. Prabha, f.n.
George, R., 260 f.n.
Gildmeester, Mrs. L.D. Van Gheel, 222
Gomery, Miss, 214
Goodall, Miss, 212
Gujri, Noor, 262
Gul Khatun, Queen, 144, 145
Gunadevi, 121
Gupta, Miss Rita, 257 f.n.
Gurkhu, Miss C., 257 f n.

H

Hamsi, Singer, 111, 112
Habba, (or Zoon), Queen and Poetess 17, 153, 154. 155, 156, 157
Hassan, Miss Sofia, 257 f.n.
Hussain, Mrs. Sakeena, 257 f.n.
Hussain, Tahira, 266
Hull, Miss E.G., 214

I

Indradevi, Queen, 119
Indradevi, 258 f.n.
Ishandevi, Queen of Jalauka, 59, 60
Ishandevi, Queen of Lalitaditya, 120

J

Jayamati, Queen, 83, 85
Jalali, Kanta, 258 f.n.
Jayadevi, Queen, 99, 121
Jankidevi, 258
Jayarala, Princess, 159
Jehan Ara, Begum, 266

K

Kadalbuji, Shanta, 258
Kalhanika, Queen, 87, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 112, 113
her works, 96, 97
Kalsum, Dr. Tahira, 259 f.n.
Kamladevi, Queen, 110, 120
Kamlavati, Queen, 120
Kalyandevi, Queen, 99, 120
Kankali, Artiste, 117
Kavyadevi, 121
Kaw, Dr. Durga, 259 f.n.
Kayya, Queen, 11
Khadana, Queen, 119
Khadija, Hafiza, 162
Khanum, Dr. Tahira, 259 f.n.
Knowles, Miss Kate, 209
Kotadevi, Queen. 13, 14, 44, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 139
Koul, Deviki, 228, 254
Koul, Dulari, 266
Koul, Dr. Durga, 259 f.n.
Koul, Kishori, 268, 269
Koul, Prabha, 258 f.n.
Koul, Shanta, 266
Koul, Miss Sheela, 257 f.n.
Koul, Vimladevi, 251, 254, 255, 258
Krityadevi, 116, 117
Krityashrama, 117
Kudamal, 172, 173, 174, 175
Kujji, Posha, 227
Kuyya, 35

L

Labroo, Prabha, 259
Lachhma, Queen, 139, 140, 141
Lachhma, Daughter of General Saif Dar, 159, 160
Lakshmi, Sidha 227
Lakshmi, Yuvrani Yashorajya, 261
Lalla, (Lal Ded), 17, 123, 126, 127, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 166, 167
Lassa, Queen, 140, 141
League, Women's, 228
Lothika, 121

M

Magazine, Dr. Chuni, 259 f.n.
Mala, Shanta, 257 f.n.
Malhotra, Mrs., 260 f.n.
Malik, Satyavati, 267
Mall, L.N., 260 f.n.
Mal, Radha, 227
Mallinson, Miss, 214
Maryam, Hafiza, 162
Maryam, 260 f.n.
Mehta, Iravati, 223
Mera Mukhat, Queen, 145, 146, 147, 148, 150, 151, 152, 158
Mirza, Soma, 267
Mahammad, Sadiqa, 258 f.n.
Mohan, Miss Krishna. 257 f.n.
Mohini, Dr. Jagat, 259
Mohini, 260 f.n.
Mufti, Miss Shamla, 257 f.n.
Mukhta, 260 f.n.
Mukhta, 260 f.n.
Munshi, Dr. Shanta, 259 f.n.
Muttu, Mohini, 257 f.n.

N

Naga, 38
Nagalatta, Dancer, 111
Nagari, Usha, 260 f.n.
Naqishbandl, Miss, 257 f.n.
Naqishbandi, Dr. J.A., 259 f.n.
Narendradevi, Queen, 119
Nehru, Rameshwari, 228
Noona, Nurse and Diplomat, 112, 113
Nripamala, 164

P

Padmavati alias Nanni, 218, 235
Pandit, Mrs. Jai Kishori, 257 f.n.
Patric, Miss Erene, 209
Polygamy, 10, 201, 234, 242, 271
Parkashadevi, Queen, 119
Purbi, Mrs. L., 223
Purdah, 9, 16, 242, 243, 245
Pursharthvati, 267

Q

Qureshi, M., 258 f.n.
Qureshi, Dr. Sajada, 259 f.n.

R

Raddadevi, Queen, 86, 87, 95
Rampal, Miss Savitri, 257 f.n.
Raina, Gauri, 258 f.n.
Rambal, Dr. Vimla, 259 f n.
Raina, Miss Shakuntala, 257 f.n.
Ranarambha, Queen, 119
Ratn, G., 260 f.n.
Ratnadevi, Queen, 121, 122
Ratnamala, 164, 165
Razdan, Ranim Ded, 228
Razdan, Dr. Sheela, 259 f.n.
Razdan, Shakuntala, 258 f.n.
Razdan, Uma, 253, 258
Renzu, Mrs. 266 f.n.
Robinson, Miss, 209
Rupa Bhawani, (or Rwaff) 165, 166, 167, 168

S

Sahaja, Queen, 109
Sahiba Nishawan, 161
Saliha Begum, 159
Salah-ud-din, Miss Sultana, 257 f.n.
Samma, Queen, 119
Sambhavati, Queen, 121
Samru, Begum, *see* Farzi
Sarladevi, 260 f.n.
Sati, 11, 12, 18, 82, 85, 109, 195, 231, 234
Sawhney, Dr. Iqbal, 259 f.n.
Sawhney, O., 260 f.n.
Sevasadan, 228
Shaha Bibi, 161
Sharda, Queen, 100
Shangloo, Gaura Batni, 255
Shangloo, Mrs. R. 257 f.n.
Shaukatali, Begum, 266
Sharma, Miss Shanta, 257 f.n.
Shahmiri, Miss T., 257 f.n.
Shakun, Mrs. Kumari, 266
Shri Khatun, Queen, 158
Silla, Commander, 100, 101, 102, 103
Sobana, Princess, 152
Srilekha, Queen, 66, 67, 68
Stubbs, Miss, 212
Sugandhadevi, Queen, 25
Suryamati, Queen, 69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82
her works, 73
Sussala, 122
Swayamvara, 12, 22

T

Taravati, Maharani, 230
Tara, Dancer, 163, 165
Taylor, Miss Churchill, 212,
Tekri Master, 218
Thakkana, Dancing girl, 110
Thusoo, Mrs. P.N., 258 f.n.
Tiku, R.D., 260 f.n.
Tillotama, Queen, 121
Trust, Women's Welfare, 20, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 240

U

Ubhayabharati, 6
Urmila, 267
Utsava, Dancer, 163, 165

V

Vaishnavi, Miss Santosh, 257 f.n.
Vatsyayana, Kapila, 267
Vakpushta, Queen, 60, 61, 62, 63
Vitasta, the, 34, 37, 82, 85, 92, 103
Volga, 37
Vyath, 160

W

Wanchoo, Miss Sarla, 257 f.n.
Wazir, Kamla, 258 f.n.
Wazir, Dr. Shanta, 260 f.n.
Widow, Remarriage of—, 11, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 250, 251
Women, Kashmiri,—of poorer classes, 1, 3, 16
—of high caste, 2, 5, 16
status of—,3, 20, 21
education of—, 5, 19, 20
personal adornment of—, 6, 7, 8, 9,
rights of—, 10, 13, 14, 15
Women's College, 256, 257

Y

Yashovati, Queen, 23, 24
Yukadevi, Queen, 119

Z

Zafarali, Begum, 258, 261
Zai Ded, 160
Zalpuri, R.D , 260 f.n.
Zeb-un-nisa, Princess, 163
Zenana Missionary Society, 209
Zoon Ded, 160

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